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If a man die











**IF A MAN DIE**

**J. D. JONES, D.D.**





# IF A MAN DIE

BY THE REV.

J. D. JONES, D.D.

AUTHOR OF "THE HOPE OF THE GOSPEL,"  
"THE GOSPEL OF THE SOVEREIGNTY," ETC.



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TO  
THE DEAR MEMORY OF  
MY WIFE





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**IF A MAN DIE**





## IF A MAN DIE—

**T**HERE is no question to which the human soul more eagerly desires a clear and sure answer than this one: "If a man die, shall he live again?" It is an old, old question. Job asked it long ago in an agony. The one fact he could see, the one fact which admitted of no challenge or dispute, was the tragic fact of death. "Man dieth and wasteth away; yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he? As the waters fail from the sea, and the river decayeth and drieth up, so man lieth down and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be roused out of their sleep." And yet, if the grave really was the end, if death was the very last word, it seemed to Job that life was just a tangled web of injustice and wrong, and that there could not be a wise and good God at the heart of things. That sorely-tried patriarch passionately desired an assurance that man should live again. He al-

most demanded a future life to rectify the wrongs and waste and distresses of this. There is entreaty, there is pathetic appeal, there is passion and desire in this question: "If a man die, shall he live again?"

Thousands and tens of thousands of people are asking that same question with a similar urgency in these days of ours. The awful harvest which death has been reaping in the Great War has made it the question of questions for a vast host of bereaved fathers and mothers and wives and lovers. They want to know—what of their beloved dead? Is a grave in France or Mesopotamia, or beneath the waters of the North Sea the end of them, or shall they live again?

Five-and-twenty or thirty years ago the great mass of our people seemed to be very little interested in the question of a Beyond. Sir George Adam Smith, writing at that time, could say, "In the thinking of civilised man there has been for years a steady ebb from the shores of another life." What John Ruskin calls the "heaven light" was fading out of the life of the average man, and he was tending to limit his vision to the cares

and duties and pleasures of the passing day. But the Great War has changed all that. The tide has turned. Men are asking questions about the Beyond. They want to be assured that there is a Beyond. Nothing but the clear certainty of a life to come avails to comfort the stricken hearts of men in this time of widespread sorrow and loss.

But can we get this clear certainty? Have we a right to cherish the belief that though a man die, he shall live again? The belief itself is so tremendous, and so much depends upon it, that we ought to have good and sufficient grounds for holding it. I am persuaded that we have such good and sufficient grounds for faith, and what I want to do in this opening chapter is to suggest some of the reasons which justify us in believing confidently, unhesitatingly, exultingly, that though our dear ones die, they live again.

The one great difficulty in the way of belief is just the cold, stubborn, obtrusive, universal fact of death. We know that men die, that all men die; and after death, so far as we can see, there is nothing but darkness and silence. At death, to all appearance, the

total man seems to perish. And materialistic science steps in just at this point and asserts loudly and categorically that that is exactly what happens. It denies the real existence of what we call "spirit." It declares that thought is simply a function of the brain. There is no "I," no thinking, aspiring, spiritual Being apart from the body, and therefore when the body dies the "I" simply ceases to be. Now, of course, if all this were true, there would be nothing more to be said. We should have to admit that when the breath left the body all was over and over for ever. But no scientist, however eminent, has any right to assert that this is true. That thought is always accompanied by certain physical movements of the brain is indisputably true, but that it is the *product* of them no one has any right to say. Tyndall himself confessed that the *nexus* between consciousness and the movements of the brain was "unthinkable." But if on the confession of the extremest materialist of them all the connection between brain movements and thought is "unthinkable," those scientists are quite without warrant or justification who assume that the



connection is causal, and who on the strength of that assumption assert that when the brain ceases to function, consciousness ceases to be. So far as science is concerned, while it may have nothing positive to say about life after death, it opposes no insuperable barrier to belief. F. W. H. Myers accurately sums up the position of science when he says: "The affirmative she holds as unproved, and the negative as unprovable." "The negative as unprovable"—that is to say, science does not and cannot deny the possibility of a life to come. So that we may start our inquiry with our minds quite clear on this point—there is no stark antagonism, as some would have us believe, between science and faith in this matter of immortality. Science may not help belief, but it certainly does not forbid it.

But even though science has no fatal objection to offer at the very threshold, we are still confronted by the universal fact of death. What reasons have we for believing, in spite of this brutal and challenging fact, that man shall live again? I am going to mention three. "A threefold cord," says the

Preacher, "is not quickly broken," and these three reasons taken together furnish us with sure ground for happy faith in a life to come. The first reason is based on the nature of man, the second on the character of God, and the third on the experience of Christ. The first is the human argument, the second is Scriptural, the third is specifically Christian.

## I

The first argument for the life beyond is derived from the consideration of the nature and constitution of man himself. It is not a specifically Biblical argument. It is found amongst writers clean outside the sphere of Biblical and Christian ideas. It is as old as Plato and Aristotle. It was indeed the only argument they had. Yet on the strength of it Plato rose to great heights of confidence and assurance, as every reader of his *Phædo* knows right well. It is not an argument that admits easily of brief and popular statement, but perhaps without indulging unduly in technicalities, its general drift may be indicated.

The argument is based upon the indisputable fact that man is a moral being. That is what differentiates him from the brute creation and constitutes him a man—he is a moral being. He is subject to moral law; he feels the constraint of duty; he is ruled by moral ideals. Now when once this is admitted, man is, as Professor Seth says, constituted heir of immortality. For the moral law, which is the law of man's true being, does not belong to this world of time and sense. It issues from a world "beyond our bourne of Time and Place," from a sphere "where time and space are not." You can account for all the actions of the animal's life without going beyond the region of the finite, but the roots of man's life stretch out into the unseen and the eternal. Man is not the servant of his appetites and instincts; he obeys a higher law,—the "thou shalt" of duty,—and the very idea of duty carries us outside this time life. Duty, as Wordsworth put it, is "the daughter of the voice of God." So that, to quote Professor Seth again, "man is, as such, an eternal being; he not only can, but must, transcend time in every

act of his moral life." But that very fact that the moral law which man is constrained to obey belongs to a sphere beyond "our bourne of Time and Place" surely suggests that it is to that supersensible and eternal sphere and not to this world of time and space that man himself really belongs. The fact that he is compelled to live as an immortal being is surely a proof that he is himself immortal. Otherwise life is reduced to an irrational and savage mockery, for it comes to this, that man is constrained to live as an immortal while in reality he is only mortal, to conduct himself as a citizen of eternity, while in reality he is only a denizen of time. Against such a conclusion our intellectual and moral natures rise in fierce revolt, for it is to derationalise the universe.

Let us look at the same argument, once again, from a slightly different angle. Every man when he wakes to conscious reflection hears what Kant calls the "categorical imperative" of duty, the "thou shalt" of the moral law. But every "thou shalt" implies a corresponding "thou canst." The thing that we ought to do, we can and must do.

But the “thou shalt” of the moral law is an infinite “thou shalt.” The best of men have never fulfilled it. Even a great saint like St. Paul has to cry, “Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect.” Unless, then, the infinite demand of the moral law is to be written down as an illusion and a mockery, man needs infinite time to fulfil it. And it is just because, deep down in their hearts, men have been sure of this “infinite time” that they have addressed themselves to tasks which they knew they could never in their earthly life accomplish, and have set ideals before themselves to which they knew they could not attain within the limits of their mortal years. That is the great truth which Browning teaches in his “Grammarians’ Funeral.” There he depicts a scholar, “dead from the waist down,” toiling at an infinite task with the fine leisure which comes from knowing he has all eternity to work in:

Others mistrust and say—“But time escapes!

Live now or never!”

*He* said, “What’s time? Leave Now for dogs and apes,  
Man has Forever!”

“Was it not great? did not he throw on God  
    (He loves the burthen!)—  
God’s task to make the heavenly period  
    Perfect the earthen?”

It is with the same splendid assurance that Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* ends. *In Memoriam* is the argument of the soul against death. It was impossible, the poet argues, that the promise and hope of Arthur Hallam’s youth should have been finally quenched. It was impossible that their deep love for one another should have been called into being only to be mocked by death. The great ideals of Hallam himself, the great love that bound Hallam and Tennyson together were both prophetic of immortality. They demanded eternity in order to fulfil themselves. So Tennyson ends his poem with lines expressive of his certainty that his friend still lived:

Dear heavenly friend, that canst not die,  
Mine, mine, for ever, ever mine. . . .  
Far off thou art, but ever nigh:  
I have thee still, and I rejoice:  
I prosper, circled with thy voice:  
I shall not lose thee tho’ I die.



Let no one dismiss this as “mere poetry.” It is not a mathematical proof, it is true. But it is something better than a mathematical proof. It is an expression of the instincts and deep convictions of the human soul. These great ambitions, ideals, and loves of ours were born of eternity and are prophetic of eternity. They have not been given us that they may be mocked and set at nought by death. God will not leave us in the dust. The grave cannot be the end. We shall rise “to other heights in other lives, God willing.” “I believe in the immortality of the soul,” says John Fiske, “as a supreme act of faith in the reasonableness of God’s work.”

## II

The second great argument for the life beyond is derived from the consideration of the character of God. This is the *religious* argument for immortality. Plato based his hopes of a future life on what he knew of human nature; the saints of the Old Testament who attained to a clear and unhesitating hope of a Beyond based that hope

on what they knew of the character of God. They did not argue, "Because man is what he is, he must be immortal"; their argument ran thus, "Because God is what He is, He will never allow man to perish." It is a more cogent and convincing argument than that which is based on human nature. It has greater conclusiveness and finality about it. Job looked at the world of men, becoming and passing away, being born and dying, and he was left with a great fear at his heart and this cry upon his lips, "If a man die, shall he live again?" But he thought of God, and rose to this splendid and triumphant faith. "After my skin hath been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh shall I see God." When he thought of God, he knew that death and darkness were not the end. He became sure of his own immortality, "I shall see God."

The special point to which the argument for immortality attaches itself is God's willingness to enter into direct and personal relationship with individuals. He condescends to love men and to call them His friends. That is what religion means; it



means God and man entering into fellowship, spirit meeting with spirit, the love of man responding to the great love of God, God and man becoming friends. This communion, this friendship, this interchange of love is no mere fancy, but a great and blessed fact of experience. Multitudes of men have entered into such a holy, sacred, intimate fellowship with God. Enoch “walked with God.” Abraham was called “the friend of God.” David was a man “after God’s own heart.” Our Lord again and again insisted upon the reality of this relationship between God and the individual. He emphasised God’s condescending love and care. He declared that God counted the very hairs of our head. He talked about the Shepherd knowing His sheep by name. The friendship is not all on one side. It is not a case simply of our making a friend of God; it is a case of God making us His friends. It is not a case simply of our love going forth toward God; it is a case of God’s love flowing forth toward us. Now the question all this suggests is this. Can death put an end to this holy intimacy? Can the grave rob

God of His friends? Is a coffin to be the finish of this holy and blessed fellowship? Have we been called upon to love God and to walk with God and to live with God, and is "ashes to ashes, dust to dust" to be the close of it all? It is absolutely unthinkable. To admit the possibility of it is to sacrifice God's character. It is unthinkable that God should call men into His friendship and evoke their love and then cast them "as rubbish to the void." God's love is an uttermost and unchanging love. When God loves, He loves for ever. Death can never snatch men from that love. If it could, death would prove itself mightier than God Himself. The mere fact that God makes us His friends is a sure pledge of immortality. That relation of friendship is one which death cannot sever. Abraham during his lifetime was a "friend of God." God never let His friend go. "*I am the God of Abraham.*" Through death and into the beyond that happy relationship had persisted. The friendship had never been interrupted. The relationship was not a past but a present one. "*I am the God of Abraham.*"

It is this argument that inspires the radiant confidence of the sixteenth Psalm. We call the Psalm Messianic, and so no doubt in a very deep and real sense it is. But we must not forget that, originally, the subject of the glorious assurance of the Psalm was none other than the Psalmist himself. It is of himself he speaks when he says, "Thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol, neither wilt Thou suffer Thy beloved one to see the pit: Thou wilt show me the path of life." Now what is that? It is an assurance of immortality grounded on the character of God. The Psalmist was absolutely certain that God would never allow His "beloved one" to see "the pit." He was certain the grave could never retain God's friend. Just because he was God's "beloved one" he was quite sure that not "the pit," but "the path of life" would be his portion—larger, richer life in the very presence of God. And the inference is a perfectly sound one. Christ's words ratify and confirm it. "No one," He says, "can pluck you out of your Father's hands." Once God stands in that Fatherly relation to us, it is absolutely certain that

He will never lose His children. Friendship with God is a pledge and promise of immortality. God does not call us into His friendship to mock us at the last. Death can never baffle or bring to nought the purposes of His love. I think of that individualising love, I say with the apostle, "the Son of God loved me and gave Himself up for me," and I know my immortality is sure. I may know but little about the life on the other side of death, but I am at ease about it because I know God's friendship will endure. "I am persuaded that neither *death*, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

### III

The third great argument for the reality of the life beyond is that which is based upon the *experience of Christ*. This is the most conclusive argument of all, for when we come to deal with the experience of Christ we are out of the region of inference, and in the region of historic fact. What happened

to Jesus was this—He really died and really came to life again. Or as He Himself expresses it in His letters to the churches, “I became dead and yet lived.” The Resurrection of Jesus is not dream or fancy. It is not the product of some heated imagination; it is not the result of some visions which ecstatic and half-hysterical disciples beheld. It is sober, historic fact—as much so as the fact of Crucifixion. And I will have no whittling away of the Resurrection of Jesus. It was not a case of the survival of His spirit. He Himself lived again. The grave was empty. He took His body away with Him. It is true, it was changed; it was a spiritual body; and yet men saw on it the wound-prints in hands and side. Jesus died and Jesus came to life again. And in the Resurrection-experience of our Lord we have the final and satisfying proof of the life beyond. For, according to the teaching of St. Paul in that great fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, the experience of Jesus was no unique and solitary experience. It was a representative experience. Christ was in a profound sense the normal man, and what happened to



Him is typical of what is to happen to us all. "He is the firstfruits of them that slept."

"If a man die, shall he live again?" is the question which is being asked just now with trembling lips by thousands and tens of thousands of people who have been robbed of their dear ones in the very flush of youth. I look at the empty grave of Jesus and I am able to reply to that question a brave and confident "Yes!" "If the Spirit of Him that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, He that raised up Christ Jesus shall quicken also your mortal bodies through His Spirit that dwelleth in you." "Because I live," said Jesus, "ye shall live also."

It is the Resurrection of Jesus that converts promise into fact, and hope into assurance. Men argued for years about the possibility of there being a new world out yonder towards the West. They set forth various reasons for believing there was such a world. But what forever settled the matter and made the New World not a guess or a theory or a speculation, was Columbus's experience. Columbus sailed out towards the

sunset until he discovered land. Then coming back, he was able to say, "There is a land out yonder; I have been there." Jesus is our Columbus. When it came to the Westering sun with them, men wondered what lay beyond the sunset—whether there was anything at all, or only the black night. But we wonder now no more. We know. For Jesus has travelled beyond the sunset, and He has come back to say that beyond the grave and gate of death,

There is a land of pure delight,  
Where saints immortal reign;  
Infinite day excludes the night,  
And pleasures banish pain.

It is not true any longer that the other side of death is an undiscovered country, a "bourne from which no traveller returns." Jesus has come back. And by His coming, He has brought life and immortality to light. We do not mourn over our dead now as those who have no hope. We know that if the earthly tent of their life be taken down, they have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.



“If a man die, shall he live again?” Yes, he shall. The immortality which seemed demanded by the nature of man and the character of God is made absolutely sure by the Resurrection of Christ. And therein lies our comfort in such an hour as this—the grave is not the end. Our dear lads who have fallen in such numbers, they have not perished. They have only exchanged Time for Eternity. Let us flee for refuge to this hope set before us. The last word does not lie with death. Death is not a *cul de sac*; it is a passage-way. There are “sweet fields beyond the swelling flood.” On the other side the river of death, there is the Father’s house. “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” “Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

We bow our heads at going out, we think,  
And enter straight another golden chamber of  
the king’s  
Larger than this we leave, and lovelier.

## IF IT WERE NOT SO

THE fourteenth chapter of St. John is perhaps the best beloved chapter in the whole of Sacred Writ. It is the chapter at which Margaret Ogilvie's Testament, according to her son's account, opened of its own accord, and which, when she was too weak to read, she stooped and kissed. It is the chapter which Lockhart read to Sir Walter Scott as he lay weak and ill, and in which that noble soul found "great comfort." It is a chapter to which men and women naturally turn when the shadows gather and the night draws nigh. I imagine many people's Testaments open of their own accord at the fourteenth of St. John just now. In days like these, when death is busy and loss is common, and when partings—partings which carry with them such tragic possibilities—are so universal, men and women find great comfort in the chapter which begins, "Let not your heart be troubled," and which

speaks so calmly, and so surely, and so unhesitatingly about the Father's house. There is a great and pathetic eagerness abroad to-day to know something about the Hereafter, to be quite sure that there *is* a Hereafter. In normal times, the question of Immortality lies in the background; we are so engrossed and absorbed in the concerns of the passing day that we do not trouble very much about the Hereafter; the clamant demands of life banish the thought of death, the occupations of Time cause us to forget Eternity. But the circumstances in the midst of which we live have brought this question of Immortality from the background to the forefront. It is no longer a matter of academic debate. It has become an acute, poignant, personal problem. There are thousands and tens of thousands of people who want to know—what of their husbands and sons and brothers? Their personal happiness, their faith in the sanity of life, depend upon the Immortal Hope. In face of the challenging fact of widespread death, there is everywhere this pathetic and

wistful desire to be sure that life persists and personality endures.

The publication of Sir Oliver Lodge's book *Raymond* is but a symptom of this universal hunger and desire. I am not going to criticise that book—the sincerity and the human affection of the book place it almost beyond criticism—except perhaps to say, that I cannot confess to any great faith in the reliability of spiritual communications which profess to come through table-rapping and automatic writing. Still, I leave it to others to criticise the evidential value of the book. It is the heart-hunger which accounts for the book that interests me. It is, as most of my readers know, a book about Sir Oliver's son Raymond, who fell in the fighting in France in September 1915. It sets forth the efforts which Sir Oliver and Lady Lodge made, by the help of various media, to get into touch with their son after his death, and it narrates conversations which, Sir Oliver thinks, conclusively establish the fact that their son was in real and personal communication with them. And the book is given to the world in the hope that it may

be of some comfort to the numberless people whom the Great War has bereaved, as furnishing proof of "the survival of memory and affection after death." Whether the evidence is good or bad is for the experts to say, but at any rate in this book the parents' hearts stand revealed. Here are a father and mother deprived by death of their son, anxious above all things else to be sure that he still lives, that he still lives *as their son*; that memory and affection persist. The assurance of the continuity of life is the only thing that can really comfort and satisfy their hearts. And the mere fact that in two months the book ran through six editions is proof in itself that some assurance about the Hereafter, about Immortality, is the thing that great multitudes most desire.

That is why, at such a time as this, the fourteenth of St. John is such a much read chapter. The assurance of Immortality is so clear, so calm, so confident. The chapter gives us what is in effect our Lord's "farewell" talk with His disciples. Death was waiting for Him just a few hours ahead and He knew it. He was about to be separated

from the men who had been His friends. They were sorely perturbed at the prospect, but our Lord was serene and tranquil. There is no "sadness of farewell" in this parting talk. "Let not your heart be troubled"—so it begins. Our Lord was quite sure of the life beyond. He knew that death was but the gate to the Father's house in which He and His own would be "one for ever more." That is why anxious, troubled, sorrow-stricken people thumb this chapter. It is so brave, so confident, so cheerful.

And yet, when we begin to examine the chapter we find that it does not tell us very much about the Hereafter. It declares that there is waiting for us "the Father's house," and that in that Father's house there are "many mansions"—plenty of room for everybody—and there it leaves it. No doubt, from such a phrase as "the Father's house," and from that other phrase "many mansions," many comforting deductions can be drawn. But the actual words of Christ, though quite clear and sure, are very simple and restrained. There come times to us all when we wish Christ had said more. There



are great questions we should like to have put to Him, and on which we should like to have received exact and definite information. It is just because people want fuller and more precise information that spiritualism has its vogue and that books like *Raymond* find such a sale. But Christ contented Himself with the assertion of the bare fact—for the rest He would have people trust Him.

I wonder why it was He said so little. I wonder why it was He contented Himself with saying simply that beyond the grave there was His Father's house, and that in that house there was plenty of room. Why did He not go on to describe its life? Why did He not go on to tell whether in the life to come men and women know one another and love one another? Why did He not tell us more about the glory and blessedness of that life? I do not know that any one can satisfactorily answer such questions; but the following considerations suggest themselves to me when I try to account for our Lord's reticence and restraint.

(a) First of all, our Lord did not wish to



detract from the critical importance of the life which now is. *This* is the life in which we shape character and gain soul. *This* life is our day in which we accomplish the work which the Father has given us to do. If Christ had laid the emphasis upon the Hereafter, and minutely described its glories for us, we might have been so consumed with desire for the "Saints' Everlasting Rest" as to neglect and almost despise the present hour. The great saints have often experienced a sort of home-sickness of the soul. "I have a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better," said St. Paul. Heaven pulled at his very heart-strings, and it took all his moral resoluteness to go on patiently with his appointed ministry. Samuel Rutherford, that seraphic Covenanting preacher, used to fall into a kind of rapture when he thought of the "prepared place," and used to long for the day which would bring him to it. "Oh," he cries, "how sweet and glorious shall our case be, when that Fairest among the sons of men will lay His fair face to our sinful faces and wipe away all tears from our eyes. O time, run swiftly, and

hasten that day." You perhaps remember the paragraph in which John Bunyan tries to describe heaven: "Now just as the Gates were opened to let in the men, I looked in after them and behold the City shone like the sun, the streets also were paved with gold, and in them walked many men with Crowns on their Heads, Palms in their hands, and golden Harps to sing praises withal. There were also of them that had wings, and they answered one another without intermission saying, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord. And, after that, they shut up the Gate." And then John Bunyan adds this sentence: "Which when I had seen, I wished myself among them!" That brief glance filled him with ardent and almost uncontrollable longing. And sometimes I think that if the full glories of that life had been revealed to us they would so enrapture our souls, that we should have no heart for the commonplace tasks and drab duties of this earthly life. So our Lord kept them veiled—lest the home-sickness of the soul should prevent us from accomplishing here and now the work which God has given us to do.

(b) Then, secondly, our Lord's reticence and reserve are part of His demand for *faith*. "We walk by faith, not by sight." All things are not made clear and plain. We have to take many things "on trust"—trust in Christ. Our Lord consistently refused to give to men what they would consider to be convincing and overwhelming demonstrations. He declined to give to the Pharisees that sign from heaven for which they were continually clamouring. A sign from heaven would have left no loop-hole for doubt. In the presence of a sign from heaven no one could help believing. A sign from heaven would have coerced faith. But a coerced faith is not faith at all. It has no moral quality in it. We cannot help believing that two and two make four. But just because we cannot help believing it, that belief has no moral quality about it: it is no index to the bias of the soul. Real faith only reveals itself when we cannot see. For faith stands for a moral choice, the vote of the soul. Faith of that sort can only exist where there is room left for hesitation and doubt. Our Lord deliberately left some things in

shadow, not clear-cut and defined, but just outlined and suggested—His own Divinity, for instance—that faith in Him might always stand for a real venture and vote of the soul. And He left the nature of the Life Beyond in shadow too, that we might walk by faith, that we might venture everything on our trust in Him.

But those of us who trust in Christ need have no hesitation about the Hereafter. It is assured to us by what He was and did; and by what He said; and by what He left unsaid. His silences are as suggestive as His speech. "If it were not so," He said to His sorrow-stricken disciples, *i.e.* if there were no Father's house of many mansions, "I would have told you." These disciples had got the faith in immortality in their souls. It might be dim and groping, but it was real. "I know that he shall rise again at the last day," said Martha about her brother; and in expressing her belief in a Resurrection she was but putting into words the popular creed. Perhaps the disciples would not have used the beautiful phrase, "the Father's house," to describe the abode

of the blessed. But they *did* believe in a life beyond the grave. And Christ ratifies that belief of theirs; He confirms its truth, "If it were not so, I would have told you."

The argument from silence is a proverbially unsafe and dangerous argument. But not in this case! If the faith the disciples cherished about Immortality had been false, Christ would have contradicted it. For He was the Truth, and it would have been impossible for Him to allow His disciples to be in bondage to error. And such an error! There are some beliefs, which we profess to hold, which make little or no practical difference to life. But this belief, when really held, revolutionises life from end to end; it gives a man a new perspective; it alters his entire outlook; it affects his aims, his ambitions, his hopes. Is it to be imagined that Christ would allow His disciples to go on cherishing this belief if, all the time, it was nothing but an empty delusion? Is it to be imagined that He would allow them to go on cherishing hopes which had no substance? Is it to be imagined that He would urge them to set slight store by the joys and pleas-

ures of earth, but to lay up treasure in heaven if He knew all the time that there was no heaven at all? The suggestion needs only to be made to be scouted. It was impossible that Christ should have failed to challenge and contradict a belief so pervasive and so influential, if it were really false. His very silence was proof that the great hope was true. "If it were not so, I would have told you."

The argument really bases itself on the candour of Christ's character. It is as if He said to these disciples: "You know the manner of man I am. I have never hesitated to say so, when things were false. I have never hidden things from you. Do you think I would have connived at so great a delusion as this?" The whole of the Gospel story lays emphasis on this aspect of our Lord's character—His transparent truthfulness, His fearless honesty. He came into the world, He said, to bear witness to the Truth. And He did so with uncompromising candour. He found men in possession of certain instincts, certain ideas, certain beliefs—some of them with a kernel of truth in



them, some of them totally wrong. Christ's business in the world—from one point of view—was to free the Truth from the errors that encrusted it, and set it pure, dazzling and glorious before the eyes of men. And the Truth which was Christ's special charge was religious truth—truth about God and man, the soul and its destiny.

In bearing His witness to the Truth, Christ was not afraid of challenging and contradicting beliefs and practices held in great veneration. Take the Sermon on the Mount, for example. In great part that sermon consists of a criticism of the Law of Moses. Now the Law of Moses was in the eyes of the Jew a divine and holy thing. Its every letter was sacred; its every command was binding; it was the authentic revelation of the mind and will of God. But Jesus took upon Himself to challenge and repudiate precept after precept of that venerable Law. He did not observe a discreet and prudent silence about its half-truths. He put His finger on them, and denounced them, and substituted for them His own more perfect truth, "Ye have heard that it was said by



them of old time . . . but I say unto you.” Take His repeated corrections of His disciples’ conception of His Messiahship. The disciples followed Him in the first instance with their minds simply saturated with the materialistic Jewish expectation of a great Prince who should establish a mighty kingdom. They confidently expected that Christ was destined for a throne like Cæsar’s, and they fully anticipated that they would share in the material advantages of His triumph. They were continually dreaming of thrones, and again and again they had fierce and angry controversies as to who should be greatest. But from the very beginning Christ set Himself to correct these mistaken notions of theirs. He eschewed advertisement, He bade the recipients of His mercy tell no man. When the people wanted to take Him by force and make Him king, He deliberately hid Himself from them. When His disciples quarrelled about the first place, He took a little child and set him in the midst and taught them the greatness of ministry. When He set His face to go to Jerusalem for the last time—the disciples perhaps flatter-

ing themselves that at last the hour of His enthronement had come—He took them and told them plainly the bitter truth. “Behold,” He said, “we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man shall be delivered unto the chief priests and the Scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles; they shall mock Him and shall spit upon Him, and shall scourge Him and shall kill Him, and after three days He shall rise again.” Jesus would not have His disciples lie under any illusions. He told them plainly that He was marching not to a Throne but to a Cross.

Take again, for illustration, His treatment of that enthusiastic person who one day came to Him and said, “I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest.” Our Lord saw that he too was cherishing false hopes. But He would have no one follow Him under a delusion. So with a candour that was almost cruel He confronted Him with the facts. “The foxes have holes,” He said, “and the birds of the heaven have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.”

That is the character of Jesus as the Gospels reveal it to us—frank, honest, candid, truthful, intolerant of error, daring to challenge falsities even when they were supposed to possess the Divine sanction, and especially resolved that no one should follow Him under false pretences or cherishing delusive hopes, but determined rather that to all the naked and unvarnished truth about His service and its issues should be told. So He challenged precepts of the Mosaic law; He challenged the current ideas of Messiahship; He challenged the popular notions of greatness; He contradicted and repudiated the disciples' expectations of temporal advantage. He, the Truth Incarnate, could not countenance or wink at falsity and error. And is it to be imagined that if the hope of immortality had been a cheat and a delusion that Jesus would not have challenged it? Is it to be imagined that He, the Incarnate Truth, would suffer His best friends to live and die "self-deceived," as Dr. Ker expresses it, "on so momentous a question"? Is it to be imagined that He would allow them to buoy themselves up with this hope of

a life beyond the stars if He knew that "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust" was the very end? To imagine any such thing is to sacrifice the character of Christ; it is to shatter the entire fabric of the Christian faith. But the idea is utterly inadmissible! The candid, honest Christ challenged and contradicted many a popular and inherited belief—but He never challenged this one. Never a word of criticism escaped His lips about this instinct, this faith, this hunger of the soul for Immortality. He accepted it, ratified it, confirmed it, because it was the truth. The very silence of the candid Christ is a mighty reinforcement of faith. "If it were not so, I would have told you."

And the argument from the silence of the candid Christ applies not simply to the bare fact of immortality, but also to those ideas and hopes which men cherish with reference to the nature of the immortal life. I will but mention two of them and that in the briefest possible way.

(a) First of all there is our desire for *per-*

*sonal* immortality. It is not an immortality of influence men crave for; it is not identification with some vast All of being that they desire. They hunger for a personal immortality, a conscious and individual immortality, in which you will be you and I shall be I. That is the hope of men; that is the instinct of the soul. It was the instinct of the soul when Jesus was here upon earth. If the instinct had been false, is it to be imagined that Christ would not have challenged it? Is it to be imagined that He, the Truth Incarnate, would have allowed men to administer that comforting balm to their souls, if it were only a vain delusion? If it were not so, Christ would have told them. And He would have told us. We can trust implicitly the instinct of the soul on this point. We shall not be lost and merged in some vast ocean of being. We shall exist as ourselves. Life, hereafter, will be conscious, individual, personal. "If it were not so, I would have told you."

(b) And, secondly, there is the question of *recognition*. That too is an instinct and craving of the soul. Without it, to many

people, immortality would be a thankless boon. Without it, heaven to them would be but a desert. I have read somewhere that Bishop Simpson of America, preaching on this very point of recognition, broke out in the midst of his sermon with the cry: "What would heaven be to me without my Willie?", Willie being a dear son whom he had lost a few months before. And that is what many a wife, many a mother is saying just now, "What would heaven be to me without my ——?" The human heart craves and demands recognition, the old interchange of love and affection, as an indispensable condition of blessed life. This is one of the great joys we associate with the Hereafter—reunion with our loved ones, the vision of those angel faces which we have loved long since and lost awhile. And our instinct does not delude us. Men cherished that hope in the old days. Is it to be imagined that our Lord would have allowed them to cherish it had it been false? He was quick to correct mistaken notions about the eternal life, as He did in His answer to the Sadducees. But He had no word of criticism



for this beautiful and pathetic hope of reunion. His silence is an argument for its truth. So we may cherish quite confidently the happy hope of recognition and reunion. If it were not so, Christ would have told us.

And so, although Christ says but little by way of detail about the immortal life, I know that we cannot think too gloriously about it. I know that life will be personal, and that love will reign there as here. I do not need to betake myself to spiritualism in order to become blessedly sure of this. My authority is that of the frank and candid Jesus. If it were not so, He would have told us. And for the rest, we can quietly trust Him.

Our knowledge of that life is small,  
The eye of faith is dim;  
But 'tis enough that He knows all,  
And I shall be with Him.

## THE BANISHED FEAR

*CUR DEUS HOMO?* is the title of Anselm's great work—one of the epoch-making books of theological thought—"Why did God become a Man?" The question admits of a variety of answers. But the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says that one object of the Incarnation was this, that "He" (*i.e.* the Incarnate Christ) "might deliver all them that through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." And this deliverance Christ affected by His own dying. Our Lord's death was no accident. It was not a case of the high-priests being too clever and too strong for Him. His death was voluntary and self-chosen. It is not too much to say that Christ made Himself a partaker of flesh and blood in order that He might die. And He died in order that He might win deliverance for men. Only by dying could He nullify Satan's power and rescue the captives whom

Satan had enslaved by the fear and terror of death.

And that deliverance He actually achieved by His death and Resurrection. He "accomplished the Exodus." He has saved men from "the terror by night." He has dispersed the chill shadow that clouded their day. The Jews had a saying to this effect, "In this life death never suffers a man to be glad." Death was the skeleton at every feast. It was the bitterness in every cup. It was the discord in every music. It was the nameless dread that haunted men through life and turned their hearts to water when they thought of it. And that was one of the things that Jesus did by dying and rising again—for His dying is never to be thought of apart from His rising again; His dying and rising are like the obverse and reverse of the same coin—He emancipated men from that terrifying dread and gave them hope in their death.

There is no enslavement so galling as enslavement to a fear. Here is a man with a crime upon his conscience. It is an undiscovered and therefore—so far as society is

concerned—an unpunished crime. But that man, though no earthly court has ever passed sentence upon him, pays for his crime in a constant enslavement to fear. Every sound startles him; he reads menaces in the most innocent words; a touch on the shoulder makes him pale with fear, lest it should be the officer arresting him in the king's name. Many a man, indeed, unable to bear the torment of fear any longer, has given himself up to justice. Better the handcuffs, and the prison cell, and the very worst that law can do, than the enslavement of a ceaseless dread. But the worst of all fears, and therefore the most terrible of all enslavements, is that caused by the fear of death. Possibly I may be challenged at this point and told that the vast majority of people are so occupied with life and its manifold interests that they have not time to think about death, and that, as a matter of fact, they are not worrying themselves about it. But I wonder whether that is really so. I know that people do not often talk about it. Glib and facile talk about a subject so serious and so solemn would be a profanity. But suppos-

ing we could read their thoughts, supposing we could discover their secret hearts—even the hearts of these dear lads of ours who “go over the top” with such gay and dauntless courage—should we find that they were not worrying themselves about death, never even giving a thought to it? I agree with what Dr. Carnegie Simpson says in his latest book that, despite of all avoidance of speech, the subject itself is not really ignored in men’s hearts. How can it be when scarcely a day passes which does not remind us of the fact of death?

Just when we’re safest, there’s a sunset touch,  
A fancy from a flower-bell, some one’s death  
A chorus ending from Euripides,  
And that’s enough for fifty hopes and fears.

How can it be when death, in these terrible days, is continually intruding into the circle of our acquaintances, our friends, our relations, our own families? How can it be when every one knows that, sooner or later, nearer or further, death waits for him—the one absolutely inevitable, unescapable fact? We may come to terms with some of our troubles

—medical and surgical science is able to do miracles nowadays in the way of alleviating physical pain; we are able to divert our minds or steel our hearts when sorrows come, but there is no making terms with death. Our subterfuges and evasions and attempts to escape avail us nothing. Death is a tremendous and terrible fact which we have all of us to face and meet. And to know that death awaits us, inevitable, unavoidable, unescapable, though we know not where it lurks or when it may smite us down—I say, to know all that without being able to face death, whenever and wherever it may meet us, with a brave and cheerful heart is simply to be all our lifetime subject to bondage, to be the slaves all our days of a paralyzing fear.

Now one of the great things Christ did for our race by His dying and rising again was to give us deliverance from this enslaving fear of death. And what I propose to do in this chapter is to ask what it is in connection with death that fills the human heart with fear, and how it is that our Lord brings us deliverance from it. There is surely no



need for apology for discussing such a theme as this. It may be morbid to speak and think of death too much, but it is foolish and disastrous not to speak or think of it at all. There death is—the one unescapable fact. We do not get rid of it by ignoring it. The brave and indeed the only reasonable thing is to face it, to ask wherein its terror consists, and to see if there is any way of overcoming that terror or getting release from it. Let us together then consider why it is that men fear death, and how it is that Christ delivers us from such fear.

## I

I begin with this, men fear death because of the physical pain that so often accompanies the act of dying. There is no need to say much about this for the simple reason that it is the least considerable element in our fear of death. The fears that make death really dreadful are not physical, but spiritual. As a matter of fact, history teems with examples of victory over the physical pains of death. Every fireman who dashes

into a burning house, every sailor who flings himself into the sea to rescue a drowning passenger, every dear lad who falls in the fore-front of the battle has emancipated himself from the physical fear of death. But while this element in the fear is by no means the most important, it is not altogether to be ignored. That is why a great many people shrink from death. They shrink from the weary days and weeks of pain that so often precede it. That is why increasing multitudes refuse to join in that petition in the Litany which prays for deliverance from "sudden death." "Sudden death"—death without preliminary weakness or waiting or pain—is to numbers of people their idea of *euthanasia*, the manner of death which is most to be desired.

Now about this fear of pain—the pain that often attends the dissolution of this earthly tabernacle—there are two things to be said. (a) We ought not, unnecessarily, to anticipate troubles. Perhaps, after all, the pain we fear will not fall to our lot. God may bring us to our great change in our sleep; or He may so swiftly translate us that

we shall really not see death. The manner of our going is within God's decision, not ours. In the meantime we ought not to worry about ills which may never happen. (b) But even should the pain come, we need not fear, because Christ will be with us in the midst of it, not simply to sympathise with us, but really to give us grace to bear it. That was one reason why He Himself endured all the pains of death, that He might be able to sympathise perfectly with mortal men. But He does more than sympathise. He is the living and present Lord; He gives us His presence and power. There is a touching story told of a wounded lad in one of the American hospitals during the Civil War, who thought he could face the end if only the President would hold his hand; and Abraham Lincoln went and sat by the lad's bedside and tenderly kept his hand in his own until he had accomplished his journey. But there is no help so effectual as that of the presence of Christ. Men can do anything and bear anything with Him to strengthen them. And thus, by His real and holy Presence, He takes away the fear

of the pain of dying. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me."

## II

A much more serious element in the fear of death is this—death takes men away from the world they know and love, and launches them into the unknown. We love the familiar; we instinctively fear the strange. That is one great reason why men are afraid of death. This life they know; they know its joys and pleasures; they know its sorrows and pains. But they do not know what is going to happen when this life comes to an end. Beyond the grave, everything seems dark, and men and women are apt to people the dark with terrors. That was why, in the old times, "length of days" was regarded as such a supreme boon. That was why the saints of God in the Old Testament pleaded that they might be spared a few more years and be allowed to recover strength ere they went hence. It is this fear of the unknown

that breathes through Hamlet's great soliloquy:

To die, to sleep;  
To sleep: perchance to dream; ay, there's the rub;  
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come  
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,  
Must give us pause. There's the respect  
That makes calamity of so long life;  
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,  
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,  
The pangs of despis'd love, the law's delay,  
The insolence of office, and the spurns  
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,  
When he himself might his quietus make  
With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear,  
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,  
But that the dread of something after death,  
The undiscover'd country from whose bourne  
No traveller returns, puzzles the will  
And makes us rather bear those ills we have  
Than fly to others that we know not of?

Men cannot see what lies beyond the grave, and so they fear and shrink from death which snatches them from this fair earth and the old haunts, and the familiar tasks, and which puts lover, friend, and acquaintance far from them in the darkness. This fear of the unknown was and is to many

people a large element in the dread of death.

But Christ by His dying and rising again has delivered us from that fear. For He has revealed to us what lies beyond the bourne of time. He went down to the gates of death and passed through them, and then for a brief space He came back in order to release us from our fears by telling us what lies on the other side. First of all, He tells us that there *is* another side. It is not into extinction and nothingness we pass when the soul leaves the body; there is a Beyond; there is a Hereafter; there is a Life to come. Then, further, He tells us that the Beyond is a fairer, richer, happier world than this. Life not only does not cease, it becomes deeper, fuller, gladder. What happens when we strike the tent of our earthly life? We find waiting for us a building, a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Whither do we go when we leave this familiar world? We go to the place prepared for us in the Father's house of many mansions, whither many of our loved and dear have already preceded us. And



by making men sure of this, Christ has completely delivered those who have believed His word from all fear of death. So completely has He done this that they have even hoped for the end to come in order that they might enter upon that larger and better life. "I have a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better," says St. Paul. "Come quickly, Lord Jesus," cries St. John. Christ had clean delivered them from that fear of death which is begotten of the sense of the unknown, by revealing to them the life of power and opportunity and blessedness that waited for them on the other side. And so He delivers men still. Mr. Ready-to-Halt was a timid pilgrim. But the last words he was heard to say as he went down to the river were, "Welcome life, welcome life!" Jesus by His dying and rising again has for ever delivered men from this particular fear. For though they cannot see, they are verily sure that after death comes the "land of pure delight, where saints immortal reign."

## III

But the chief element in that fear of death which keeps men all their lifetime in bondage is that which is due to the sense of sin and the looking for of judgement. "The sting of death," says St. Paul in a very deep and profound word, "is sin, and the strength of sin is the law." What makes the end to be "death" is sin; and what gives "sin" its power to shake the heart is that it brings to man the sense of offended and outraged law. Sin, according to St. John, is lawlessness. And this is what makes the fear of death: we have all of us an instinct that when we leave the body we shall be confronted with that "law" which we have broken and set at nought. "After that—the judgement." And that is the real fear in death—the fear which is the result and consequence of our own sin. "The sting of death is sin."

I do not believe that death is in our world by God's intention. The Bible is never tired of insisting upon it that there is a close and intimate connection between sin and death. The one is the result and consequence of the

other. If sin had never come into this world of ours, death would never have come. I do not suggest that if sin had never come, life, as we know it, would have been endless. But the end would not have been this coarse, cruel, terrifying thing we call death. I have sometimes tried to imagine what the end of the earthly stage of man's career would have been like if he had never fallen and sinned. I have fancied sometimes that we get a hint of it in what is told us of the patriarch Enoch. "He was translated," says the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "that he should not see death." During the years of his earthly life, the writer of the book of Genesis says, he "walked with God." Then, one day, he disappeared from the haunts of men. "He was not; for God took him." God called him to a closer walk and a still dearer fellowship, but he never set eyes on the ugly, grisly, brutal thing we call death. He was "translated," without pain or fear, from one of God's houses to another. Sometimes I have fancied that we get a hint of what the end would have been like in what happened to our Lord on the Holy Mount:

His raiment became white and glistening, and the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His face did shine like the sun, and His whole form was transfigured. For a brief space, on the Holy Mount, what was mortal in Jesus was swallowed up of life. Without passing through death and the grave, our Lord found Himself in glory. He was clothed upon with His habitation which was from heaven. And, but for sin, our end might have come by a glorious transfiguration of that kind. "Thou wilt not suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption," says the Psalmist. Historically, that word found its fulfilment only in the case of Jesus, for He alone of all the sons of men was holy, harmless, undefiled. But if only man had remained holy, he too would never have seen corruption. Without the terrifying accompaniments of pain and weakness and death and the grave, he would have passed into the larger and ampler life of the saints in glory.

But death—this vulgar, bullying thing, that shatters men's purposes and breaks their hearts and fills the world with lamentation and woe, this thing of dread and fear

—is not here by God's intention; it is the result and consequence of sin. That is what the Sacred Writer means when he says that the devil has "the power of death." He does not mean that the devil has power to inflict death when and on whom he pleases. Our times are not in Satan's, but in the Father's hands. What he means is that the devil, as the tempter to sin, has the power to make death *death*. It is sin that gives death its κρατος, its power to shake and terrify the soul. For sin always brings with it a certain fearful looking for of judgement and fiery indignation, and it is this fear which constitutes death's final terror.

But Christ delivers men absolutely from this fear, by delivering them from the sin which is the cause of it. Through death, He brought to nought him that had the power of death—that is, the devil. He robbed him of his weapons. He rendered him helpless. He could no longer use men's sins to torture and terrify their souls. For our Lord by His own dying took away sin. He cancelled it, He blotted it out. Sin has no more to say to us. And by so doing He took the "sting"

out of death. By setting man's conscience free from guilt, He set his heart free from fear. "There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." There is no longer any "law" to accuse him, there is no longer any judgement to fear. He has been cleansed and loosed from sin. He has boldness at the judgement for he knows that great day will bring him not doom and destruction but the crown of eternal life.

And so the "fear" of death was taken away. The slaves to that fear were emancipated and set free. Christ by dying destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil, because, by dying, He took away the sin which gave him the power. Christ, the Christ who died and rose again, the Christ who made atonement for the sin of the world, became by that very fact, as our old hymn expresses it, the "death of death, and hell's destruction." So it became necessary to invent a new name for what the world calls "death." Christ has not taken away death itself, His people still go down to the gates of the grave. But He has extracted from it all its terrors. He has



changed its very nature. Hence "death" is no longer the fitting term for the end of the man who knows and loves the Lord. "He that believeth in Me," He said, "shall never *die*." Jesus died! "Died" in the deep and dreadful and tragic sense of the word. He "tasted" death. He got the full flavour of it. He knew the forsakenness and the woe which make up the "death" which is the consequence of sin. But just because He exhausted that "death," no one who believes in Him ever dies. He died for all. A new word must be discovered for the end of those who love and trust Him, and He Himself has provided it for us. "Our friend Lazarus *sleepeth*!" That is the word! Stephen "fell on sleep." The place where we lay our dead is a "cemetery," a kindly sleeping-place. That is all death means to the Christian man. It is just a sleep; it is a case of "good-night." And the realisation of that takes all fear away. "I am not afraid to be surprised with fear," said the great Marquis of Argyle on the eve of his execution. Christ had clean emancipated him from the dread of death. And He does the same for all

those who truly believe in Him. "O death, where is thy victory?" we too may say. For death does not mean extinction and nothingness. It is but the closing of our eyes on one scene to open them on a fairer. "I will both lay me down in peace and sleep, for Thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety."

## SPIRIT WITH SPIRIT CAN MEET

**T**HE writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews keeps one object steadily before his mind from the first sentence to the last. His thesis, you may say, is the measureless superiority of the Christian over the Jewish faith. The letter was addressed to Jews who had become Christians. Their change of faith had brought with it a certain sense of loss. Some of them perhaps were in danger of thinking they had made a bad bargain. For everything about the externals of Christianity was poor and mean when contrasted with Judaism. To begin with, the Jewish nation was a proud nation, with a great history and possessed of certain great covenants and promises; the Christian people, on the other hand, were a despised and feeble folk. The Jews had a Temple, as the home and seat of their religion, which was one of the wonders of the world; the Christians met for worship in humble, private dwellings, in

caves and holes of the earth. The Jewish worship was itself ornate and stately; the Christian worship was bare and simple and austere. Externally, the advantages were all on the side of Judaism. The object, however, of the writer of this letter is to make these Hebrew Christians feel that in exchanging Judaism for the Christian faith they had lost nothing but gained much. Really and essentially their Christian faith admitted them to an infinitely richer inheritance.

In a great paragraph in Chapter xii. he contrasts the two faiths, perhaps specially from the point of view of worship. The religion which they had left was external and sensuous, and had the effect of keeping them at a distance from God. The religion which they had embraced admitted them into new and holy relationships and introduced them into spiritual and heavenly company. "Ye are come," he says,—not "ye will come" when death is past and you yourselves enter the eternal world, but "*ye are come*" now, already; the relationship was an actual one—"unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the

living God, the heavenly Jerusalem and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the Judge of all and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better than that of Abel." Every time they met to worship, they "came" into this holy and mighty fellowship. The room might be mean and small, but there was heavenly company. There were always with them those whom they could not see—for God was there and Jesus was there, and the angels were there, and the spirits of just men made perfect were there. There was no need to hanker after the old Temple. The splendour of marble and gold was nothing as compared with the splendour of the fellowship to which Christ admitted them. "*Ye are come.*" It is true of us still. There are unseen Presences with us every time we meet for worship. We have the freedom of a vast and blessed fellowship. There are more with us always than we can see. We are in touch with the heavenly and spiritual

world. That spiritual world is in touch with us. There is commerce and fellowship between us and the holy angels and the dead who live never to die again. They are with us though we cannot hear the rustle of their wings or see the shining of their faces.

“How empty it is,” said a friend to Bishop Westcott when they were visiting some church together. “No,” said the Bishop in a hushed and awestruck voice, “it is full.” Every church is full though the visible worshippers be but a handful. For all heaven is present where two or three worship in spirit and in truth.

It is not, however, about the fact that when we laud and magnify God’s holy name we do so in unison and fellowship with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven that I want to speak in this chapter, but about this other fact which the great verse already quoted quite clearly implies, viz., that death is no barrier to communion, that we are in fellowship not only with those who live on earth, but also with those who have died to earth, but who live unto God.



“Ye are come,” says the inspired writer, “to the spirits of just men made perfect.”

This great word breathes of Immortality. It is full of the Easter assurance. It is the assurance that there is another life after death that at this very moment is coming between thousands and thousands of people and sheer despair. It is the Easter assurance alone that enables us to keep our faith in the sanity of the Universe. I do not see how we could have borne the measureless sorrow and loss of this time, had not Jesus by His Resurrection brought life and immortality to light.

Faith in Immortality is reviving in multitudes of hearts in these days. “*There is a Resurrection,*” wrote a young officer to a father who had lost a son. “*There is a Resurrection.*” That is the only word that contains in it effectual comfort. And to this truth that *there is a Resurrection*, broken-hearted men and women are clinging as to their one rock of safety amid this terrible and raging storm of destruction and death. But the mere fact that *there is a Resurrection* does not altogether meet the hunger and

desire of the human soul in such an hour as this. Men and women especially desire to know what relation (if any) exists between themselves and those whom they have loved and lost. And this is the particular aspect of the life to come that I want to discuss in this chapter. I want to ask, Is there any fellowship between us and those who have passed out of our mortal ken?

One preliminary word I want again to speak by way of caution. Whoever would speak of the life to come must speak very diffidently and very reverently. Anything that savours of dogmatism is wholly out of place. Scripture has very little to say by way of definite information about the nature of the life beyond. There are many questions which are tremendously interesting to us about which it says nothing at all. It assures us of the fact of a life to come, but about the nature of it, it bids us trust Christ. So that all one can do in speaking of the life beyond is to guess, and suggest and infer certain things from scattered hints in Scripture. "Our knowledge of that life is small." It could scarcely be otherwise. I do not see

how we, compounded of flesh and spirit as we are, can form clear and definite conceptions of the life of beings who are pure spirit under conditions in which space and time no longer count. It is with that warning word that the knowledge even of the best is partial and uncertain that I venture to speak about the relationship which exists between us and those who live on the other side of death.

## I

Let me begin by emphasising one truth which is as sure and clear as Revelation can make it, this, viz., that those whom we call dead are not dead at all but *alive*. That is the real Gospel of Easter Day. Christ is the first-fruits of them that slept. What happened to Him, happens to us all. Death is not a *state*, it is an *act*. It is not a condition, it is a transition. It is not an abode in which we dwell, it is a gate through which we pass. When Christ with a loud voice gave up the ghost, He did not cease to be. He simply took down what St. Paul calls "the earthly house of this tent." He Himself entered

that moment upon a larger and richer life. We must not make the mistake of thinking that He was non-existent during those two days He lay in the tomb. The third day does not mark the resumption of life on the part of Christ, but His visible reappearance to His disciples. He was alive all the time, blessedly, vividly alive and engaged in some holy form of ministry though the Evangelists do not tell us what it was.

It is difficult to form a consistent idea of the Eschatological teaching of the New Testament. Perhaps, indeed, it is impossible to bring it into an intelligible unity. Some of the New Testament writers do seem to speak of a far-off Resurrection in which life shall be finally perfected, in which the eternal spirit shall possess a spiritual body which shall be its fitting medium and instrument. What differentiates Christ's Resurrection from every one else's, from this point of view, is that the spiritual body became His without delay. But if there be a resurrection of the body (not of course this material body, which dissolves into its elements) which is necessary to our absolute

completeness, let us lay firm hold of this great fact that we do not spend the long years and ages that may elapse between now and that far Hereafter in some state of coma or unconsciousness. The men and women who have departed this life are not in the cemeteries awaiting some trump which is to summon them again to life. We talk in a very pagan way about our dead sleeping in our graveyards. They are not there at all. I mentioned a moment ago Bishop Westcott's remark about the empty church being full. Let me put along with it a remark of Dr. Rendel Harris, equally true in its own way. He was conducting the funeral of a little child in Birmingham, and in the course of an address at the graveside he said, "This cemetery is the emptiest place in Birmingham." The cemetery is always empty. There is no one there. All that there is in the cemetery is the worn-out vesture which our dear ones have discarded because they need it no longer. But *they* are not there. They are with God. They are not asleep, but gloriously and consciously and personally alive. This much, at any rate, is not guess



or speculation, but glad and blessed fact. God is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live unto Him.

Do you remember how God describes Himself in a passage which Jesus used as an argument for the reality of the life beyond? "I *am* the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." "I *am* the God," not "I *was* the God of Abraham when he was alive." The relation was an actual and existing one. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were still alive, and alive as Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and God stood to them in the relation of their personal God. I do not know whether any final Resurrection could add anything to their completeness, it is enough for me to know that, though their bodies had crumbled into dust centuries before, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were still alive! And more gloriously alive than ever. I am not trying to state a paradox, but simply giving expression to a plain and simple truth when I say that the people whom we speak of as dead are more alive than the people we speak of as living. Their life is richer, larger, fuller. The conditions under which we live down



here impose limitations upon us. There is no need to speak a single disparaging word of the body. Still, the fact that life here is *corporeal* life places unescapable restrictions upon it. When the earthly body is laid aside, life assumes a new freedom. It is outside those fettering limitations of time and space. Life remains individual and personal. "*Thou* shalt be with Me in Paradise." "Out of my flesh *I* shall see God." But it possesses an amplitude and a fulness and a freedom not known before. So let us, I repeat, get into our minds this simple but glorious fact—the dead are not dead at all but alive—consciously alive, personally alive. It is not a case of "they have been,"—"they *are*." As Dr. Maclaren puts it in a glowing passage. "Every man that has died is at this instant in the full possession of all his faculties, in the intensest exercise of all his capacities, standing somewhere in God's presence, and feeling in every fibre of his being that life which comes after death is not less real, but more real; not less great, but more great; not less intense or full, but more intense and full than the mingled life

which, lived here on earth, was a centre of life surrounded with a crust and circumference of mortality." Just as Jesus lives Himself, but with powers unrealised before, so our dead are all alive.

## II

The second truth which I want to emphasise is this—the dead who are not dead at all but alive are *in fellowship with us*. That is the truth specially suggested by this sentence, "Ye are come . . . unto the spirits of just men made perfect." It may refer primarily to worship, to the fact that, when we come together for purposes of worship, there are others present than those we see—dear and saintly people who in the old days loved the habitation of God's house and who, though now in glory, love it still. But if such a thing as a real communion with the spirits of just men made perfect is possible in worship, the principle is established that spirit with spirit can meet; the dead who are so gloriously alive can hold fellowship with the living who have not yet died. The

“communion of saints” is not to be limited to those who still dwell in this temporal and material world, it extends to those who have passed to the other side of death. We are in touch with those who have gone before us, “we come . . . to the spirits of just men made perfect.”

I think we have grievously blundered in severing heaven from earth as we have done in our thoughts. We think of the heavenly and the earthly spheres as being totally cut off from one another, and having no communication with one another. Even our hymns have emphasised this idea of separation. And the human heart has taken its revenge for our divorce of the heavenly and earthly spheres, and our practical denial of fellowship, by betaking itself to spiritualism. I confess quite frankly that I do not like spiritualism; I find it difficult to believe that such mechanical means as table-rapping can become vehicles of spiritual intercourse; I feel that the cultivation of the occult is attended by all sorts of perils and mischiefs—of which the story of the fall of the Czar furnishes us with a recent and lurid illustra-

tion. But the entire vogue of spiritualism is due to this craving for fellowship with those who have gone before, the desire to prove that heaven and earth are in communication with one another. The only way in which we can combat spiritualism is ourselves to rescue this truth about fellowship from the neglect into which it has fallen—to speak and think in a more Christian way about those who have passed on. For the truth is, of course, that heaven and earth are not closed to one another. They are open to one another in all sorts of wondrous ways. There is communion between them; the denizens of the one world are in touch with the other. “Ye are come . . . to the spirits of just men made perfect.”

I should have argued for this on *a priori* grounds. Why should we imagine that the mere abandonment of the body means the cessation of fellowship? It would rather seem to give more and larger opportunities for fellowship. “It is expedient for you that I go away,” said Jesus. While He was in the flesh, His sphere of fellowship was limited. His disciples only felt they were

in fellowship with Him when they had Him with them in actual bodily Presence. His going away did not interrupt the fellowship. It made it constant and perpetual and more intimate still. Released from the limitations of His mortal life, Jesus was able to be with them always and everywhere. The laying aside of the body for the rest of men as for our Lord does not mean that fellowship ceases, it means that the opportunities for fellowship are enlarged. The Spirit is independent of conditions of space and time.

But I am not left to argue the matter on general principles; there are plain hints in the Scriptures that heaven and earth are not sundered from each other, that there is communion and fellowship between them, that the saints in glory are in touch with us, that they know and feel and watch and care. Take *e.g.* that great happening which took place on the Mount of Transfiguration. Moses and Elijah appeared, we are told, and were talking with Jesus. They talked with Him about the exodus He was to accomplish, the great deliverance He was to effect by His death. These saints in glory followed



Christ's every step with intensest interest. Their sympathy and prayers were continually given to Him. What happened on the Hill was that the fellowship became visible. Jesus came to the spirits of just men made perfect and was strengthened to bear His Cross by that holy and blessed communion.

Look at another sentence from the Epistle to the Hebrews, "Seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses . . . let us run with patience the race that is set before us." Heaven is not closed to earth, earth is not closed to heaven. We are "compassed about" by a great cloud of witnesses. Those who have passed on before us are still near us and about us, not only to watch how we run our race, but to sympathise with us and to cheer us, and to hold helping hands out to us.

And this is in deepest accord with the instinct of the soul. Why should we even for a moment admit the possibility that the transition we call death should be able to prevent or interrupt the outflow of love and prayer? A mother has a lad away in the trenches. Distance does not interrupt the



fellowship. She keeps in touch with her boy in thought, in love, in prayer. And are we to suppose that when the mother gets to the other side all that communion ceases? Can a mother forget her sucking child? Why, we read that even Dives, selfish man though he was, out of the eternal world let his thoughts and his prayers go out for his brothers whom he had left behind. Death on the testimony of our Lord Himself does not interrupt love and sympathy and prayer. Our dead are not only alive, but they are thinking of us, praying for us, in actual touch with us, helping us in all sorts of subtle ways. There is a passage in the *Life of Alfred Lyttelton*, recently published, which bears upon this point. Alfred Lyttelton was a noble English gentleman whom I had the honour and privilege of calling my friend. He had a tragic sorrow in early manhood. He lost his wife—a creature full of love and fire, and of whom Burne Jones speaks so warmly in his *Memoirs*—after only about a year of married life. In the printed volume the will this lovable and beautiful woman made is given. Let me

quote the paragraph about her husband, though it is almost too sacred for the public gaze: "The sadness of Death and Parting is greatly lessened to me by the fact of my consciousness of the eternal, indivisible oneness of Alfred and me. I feel as long as he is down here, I must be here, silently, secretly sitting beside him, as I do every evening now, however much my soul is on the other side." Is that to be dismissed as mere sentiment? Or does it set forth a great and blessed fact? Surely Scripture ratifies the instinct of the soul that it is a great and blessed fact. Our dear ones pass to the other side, but silently and secretly they are with us still. We are compassed about by a great cloud of witnesses. They are with us as Christ Himself is with us. We do not see Him. We hear no audible greeting from Him. And yet we know He is with us, not in memory only, but in real and actual Presence. He is spiritually in touch with our spirits. And our dear ones are in touch with us in the same spiritual way. They are not separated from us in some shut-off and closed-up heaven. They watch us and care

for us and love us and minister to us and help us in all manner of undiscerned ways. Has no mother ever stretched out a hand from the unseen to succour and save a child in danger of falling? We need not resort to séances and table-rappings to convince us that fellowship endures. We know it on the sure testimony of Holy Writ, we know it on the testimony of our experience. Heaven and earth are not shut off from one another. Dear ones pass out of sight, but not out of fellowship. They are in touch with us still. We are compassed about by a great cloud of witnesses. We come, continually . . . “to the spirits of just men made perfect.” We who belong to the Church Militant are helped by the prayers and sympathy and succour of the Church Triumphant. John Oxenham finishes a little poem in which he tries to express the feelings of a father and mother on hearing that their son was dead, like this:—

He is gone . . . yet he is near us,  
Maybe he can see and hear us,  
Yes we feel him, nearer, dearer,  
Tears have washed our souls' eyes clearer.

It takes the bitterness out of loss to feel that those whom we have lost are still alive and in touch. And we can all take that comfort to our souls. "We come . . . to the spirits of just men made perfect."

### III

It is a comfort to know that heaven and earth are open to one another, and that those who have passed into the eternal world are still in communion with us. But is the communion mutual? They help us; can we in any way help them? They pray for us; can we pray for them? One of the things Protestantism abjured and cast out was the Roman practice of "prayers for the dead." And it is no wonder that the practice was banned, for it had become the occasion of the grossest abuses. In practice it meant this, that anybody's soul could be prayed out of Purgatory if money enough was forthcoming; and this again had the most disastrous results on the moral life. But there is an old Latin proverb which says that the abuse of a thing does not take away the

rightful use of it. And the fact that the early Protestants denounced the practice for the evils that had gathered round it, does not necessarily imply that there was no truth in it. A question like this is not to be settled by bandying about the names "Catholic" and "Protestant." The answer depends on the view we take of what happens at death. If you take the view that at death a man's fate is finally and irrevocably fixed, then prayer for him becomes a sort of blasphemy. But if you believe that even beyond death God pursues His redeeming work, prayer will seem natural and fitting. There are Scriptures that seem to lend countenance to both views. There is no sure and definite word of prophecy. But there are thousands of people nowadays who are praying for their lads who have fallen. It is of no use telling them they ought not to do it. They cannot help doing it. You cannot suppress an instinct of the soul. They believe their lads are in the hands of God, and that their prayers can reach them. I am not going to cast a stone at them. If they are wrong—there is love in the very wrong,

and God will understand. But if death does not settle everything, if God there as here is intent upon His redeeming purpose, then the believing and passionate prayers offered here on earth may further the work of redemption within the veil.

I will leave it at that. The main point I want to make clear is that the sharp division between the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant does not exist. Heaven and earth are not separated and sundered spheres. There is commerce and intercourse between. They are open to one another. The communion of saints extends to the Unseen. Our dead are not dead but alive and in touch with us. "We come . . . to the spirits of just men made perfect." We are "fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God."



## WITH WHAT BODY DO THEY COME?

THE question at the head of this chapter sets forth one of the difficulties started in the minds of the Corinthians by the doctrine of the future life which St. Paul preached. For wherever the Apostle went he preached "Jesus and the Resurrection." And the Resurrection he preached was not simply the Resurrection of Jesus, but the resurrection of all men as guaranteed by the Resurrection of Jesus. It is important to notice that it was "resurrection," and not the immortality of the soul that St. Paul proclaimed. There would have been nothing in the preaching of the immortality of the soul to offend the Greek mind. Homer had sung of it. Plato had argued nobly and bravely for it. The idea was widely known and familiar even if it was not generally believed. But what St. Paul preached was something quite different. He preached

“resurrection.” He took in body as well as soul. And this idea of a “resurrection” both of body and soul moved the Athenians on Mars Hill to scornful laughter, and caused great searching of heart even to the believing people at Corinth. The laughter in the one case and the difficulty in the other were alike due to the fact that resurrection in the Apostolic sense embraced the whole man—body as well as soul.

The resurrection of the body is, without doubt, an element in the New Testament doctrine of the future life. But still men ask in bewilderment: “With what body do they come?” All the facts seem to banish the resurrection of the body into the region of the impossible and the incredible. Multitudes who firmly believe in the reality of the immortal life refuse absolutely to make the resurrection of the body an article of their creed. And yet the doctrine is not only Scriptural, but in a very deep and real way it meets the craving of the human heart. It is not simply a spiritual immortality we desire, we want to exist as ourselves, our total selves,—the same and therefore recognis-

able. It is not a vague, shadowy existence we long for, but a personal and conscious life, and to such a conscious, personal, and individual life the idea of embodiment seems indispensable. In face of this, the Scripture doctrine is not to be brushed aside and treated as if it did not deserve even a moment's consideration at the hands of thoughtful and intelligent men. It may be that in the way in which it is popularly presented the doctrine clashes with scientific truth. But the difficulties may be in the popular presentation and not inherent in the doctrine itself. At any rate, it will be worth our while patiently and seriously to consider what it is that Scripture really does say about this doctrine of resurrection which so strangely satisfies the instincts of the human soul. It is to a simple exposition of what I understand Scripture to mean by the resurrection of the body that I intend to devote this chapter.

## I

Let me begin what I have to say with a few words about the Scriptural view of hu-

man nature. This seems, at first sight, to be rather remote from the subject I want to discuss, but, in reality, it has a very close connection with it and a very vital bearing upon it. The main point on which I want to insist is this—man is a sort of duplex being. He is, as one writer puts it, “distinctively the meeting-place of two worlds, the material and the spiritual.” On the physical side, he is allied to the brute creation. But God breathed into him the breath of life, and he became a living soul. The thing that differentiates him from the rest of creation, to which physically he belongs, is that he is a being conscious of God. To put the whole thing in a sentence—man is not “flesh” simply; he is “spirit” also; he is not “body” simply; he is “soul” as well. If we wish to have accurate and adequate views of human nature, we must always bear in mind this double constitution.

There have been attempts on the part of a materialistic philosophy to deny the spiritual element in human nature and to explain man in terms of “flesh.” But the attempts have totally failed, and scientists are com-

ing increasingly to recognise the reality of "spirit." The fact is, it is not in the physical organism that the essence of human personality resides. I inhabit my body and use it, but my body is not *me*. I look out through my eyes, I work with my hands, I speak with my lips, but neither eyes nor hands nor lips, nor all of them together, are *me*. The real "I" is something within—invisible, intangible, imponderable—which directs and controls and governs the physical frame. That thinking, feeling, willing Something is the real "I."

The body is continually changing, but the "I" remains. They say that the body entirely renews itself every seven years or so. It is safe, I suppose, to say that not a particle of the body I possessed as a child exists in my body to-day. As a man I possess a body absolutely and entirely different from that which I possessed as a boy. In fact, my body has been changed three or four times in the course of the intervening years. Now if the body were *me*, I should be an entirely different "I" from the "I" of thirty or forty years ago. But I am not a different

“I.” I am conscious that the youth of thirty or forty years ago and the man of to-day are one and the same person. The “I,” therefore, cannot be this changing body, it is something within, which throughout all the years remains conscious of its identity. The real “I” is that thinking and willing Something which uses the body and controls it.

Some scientists have tried to make out that this willing and thinking Something is just a function of the brain—which again is only an attempt to explain man in terms of matter. Now, without controversy or dispute, the brain is the *instrument* of thought; that is to say, all our thinking is accompanied by certain movements of brain matter. But it does not follow that these brain movements are the source and cause of thought. For, so far as the physical particles of the brain are concerned, they are subject to the same law of change as the other constituent particles of the body. Now if the “I” really resided in the brain, there could be no such thing as memory, there could be no consciousness of identity. How comes it about that I can remember quite distinctly things



that happened, words that were said, thirty—forty—years ago? The mere fact of memory disposes of the idea that the “I” resides in the brain. The real relation between the “I” and the brain is something like that between an organist and his organ. The organist uses the organ to express the mighty harmonies which his genius has conceived or which some of the great masters have conceived for him. The organ does the organist’s bidding and gives utterance to what he desires. In much the same way, there are potencies of thought in the brain. But they become actual only at the bidding of the “I” behind. The brain is not the “I,” it is its instrument. My brain is mine to use, but it is not *me*. The real “I” is something within which thinks and feels and wills. In a word the real “I” is to be found in what the Bible calls “the spirit of man,” the soul.

But it is equally important to remember that though the real “I” is this invisible, spiritual Something within a man, we cannot conceive of man without a body. Body is as essential to our concept of man as soul is. Man is not a disembodied spirit. He is

an incarnate spirit. The differentia of humanity, its characteristic and distinguishing mark, is this incarnation. Even Jesus to become a Man had to take flesh. An unclothed spirit—if we could imagine such a thing—a pure and naked spirit, whatever else it might be, would not be a man. Man is a duplex being. He is a soul inhabiting a body. And it is to be noticed that the Scriptures lend no encouragement to any disparagement of the body. They never speak of it as a clog, a hindrance, an encumbrance; the body in the eyes of the sacred writers is a holy thing; it is the temple of the Holy Ghost. Now this conception of man as a duplex being neither pure spirit, nor mere flesh, has its intimate bearing on the New Testament doctrine of resurrection.

## II

It is worth while to emphasise the fact that it is resurrection the New Testament speaks about all the way through, and there is a great difference between resurrection and the immortality of the soul. It was the

immortality of the soul Plato argued for. He dismissed the body as being the mere cell or sepulchre of the soul. He had no room for it in his conception of the future life. In his idea of it the body was an impediment in the way of virtue and knowledge. It crippled and burdened the soul, and death was to be welcomed because it delivered the soul from the oppression of the body. Only by being released from the burden of the body could men attain to light and truth. The future life to which Plato aspired and of which he dreamed was a kind of bodiless condition. Now, in contrast with Plato, the New Testament writers do not teach the survival of the disembodied spirit simply, they preach a resurrection. And resurrection, as they use the term, embraces body as well as soul. To the New Testament writers an incorporeal existence is not real and complete life. For man is body as well as soul, and soul and body must be restored if the complete man is to live again. Plato's doctrine of the immortality of the soul gave immortality to only half the man. The New Testament doctrine conserves the whole man. It

preaches survival for man in the completeness of his being, in the total sum of his human nature. Death makes a breach in that nature; resurrection stands for the repair of the breach. Christ's redeeming work is a complete work. At the last, death is to be abolished, and everything that was death's prey is to be rescued. The body which is subject to death is to be redeemed. Humanity is to be restored. For incarnation is not an accident, it is not a passing phase; it is the expression of God's purpose and design in humanity. Disembodiment means incompleteness, and God will not leave us maimed and truncated and imperfect. He will reconstitute us "not only in the spiritual which places us in correspondence with God, but in the organic which places us in correspondence with God's creation."

This is the essential meaning of the New Testament doctrine, it stands for the salvation and redemption of man in the totality of his being, and that is why it appeals to some deep-seated instinct within us. We may find grave and serious difficulties in con-

nection with the idea of a bodily resurrection, but we are not in a position even to discuss it until we get at any rate a glimpse of this great truth which lies behind it. It is not to be dismissed as the crude belief of a primitive age. It is a protest against a partial immortality. It is an assertion that the total man is to be redeemed. It is a great and daring venture of faith that nothing essential to man shall utterly perish, but that man in the fulness of his being shall be saved into the eternal life.

### III

But the whole idea of bodily resurrection is beset with difficulties, and, in the light of the fuller knowledge of to-day, men and women are finding it increasingly difficult to repeat that clause in the Creed which commits them to belief in the "resurrection of the body." Possibly, however, the difficulty may arise from the fact that they read into the phrase the "resurrection of the body" something which Scripture never meant them to read into it, and it may be that, when

the actual teaching of Scripture is clearly grasped the difficulty will disappear.

Now let it be quite frankly and unreservedly conceded that the "resurrection of the body"—if by that we mean the reconstitution of the material particles which once composed any particular body—is inconceivable and impossible. The ancient Egyptians felt so strongly the mutual interdependence of soul and body, that they sought by scientific methods to preserve the bodies of their dead. But even an Egyptian mummy at the long last crumbles into dust. And as to the millions whose bodies have been laid to rest in the earth, those bodies have been long since dissolved into their elements and have been transmuted into other living forms. The total of Nature's forces remains the same. Forces are never lost: they are only diverted. When a body is laid in the grave, Nature sets to work to dissolve it, to take down the outworn fabric and to rebuild it into other forms new and strange. It does not destroy it, it uses it up again. The particles that once made up the human body pass into other vital organisms—grass, flow-



ers, trees, and animals, and ultimately, perhaps, into other human forms. Now, quite clearly, it is impossible to re-collect these physical particles together, for they are used again and again. As Dr. David Smith says: "The bodily tabernacles which our souls now inhabit have served myriads before us during the long ages of the past and will be theirs no less than ours at the resurrection." The idea, therefore, that the physical constituents of these bodies of ours are going to be re-collected and re-fashioned into the identical bodies we now possess must be dismissed as impossible. If Scripture asserted anything of the kind, it would be a clear case of the Scripture being detected in error.

But the Scripture asserts nothing of the sort. It expressly guards against any such crude and materialistic interpretation. It specifically and in set terms repudiates such an interpretation. The difficulties of the Corinthian Christians, which made them ask, "With what body shall they come?" arose directly from this literalistic, materialistic interpretation. And the Apostle Paul bluntly and without equivocation or

reserve rejects it. "Flesh and blood," he says, "cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." The body that is, is not the body that shall be. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. Let us therefore dismiss, once and for all, the idea that the resurrection of the body means the resurrection of the body which now is. As a matter of fact, this physical body of ours would not be suitable for the conditions of the eternal world. It is admirably adapted for our present material environment. But of what use would these bodies of ours—with their carnal functions—be in the spiritual realm? For that new life, for that changed environment, we need a changed body. And such a changed body, according to Scripture, we are to possess. "It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body." But here we come across the really great and serious difficulty which is involved in the New Testament doctrine of resurrection—How can a body be laid to rest one thing, and raised quite another and a different thing, and yet the new body have some vital

connection with the old? People still ask in bewilderment and real mental distress: "How are the dead raised, and with what body do they come?"

The inspired Apostle himself has no definite answer to give to these questions—these ultimate secrets belong to the Lord our God—but he suggests a couple of considerations which serve to show that this seemingly impossible thing is not as impossible as it appears.

(1) First of all, he points out that this change through death into something higher and nobler takes place in the case of the seed and the harvest. The farmer scatters his seed on the face of the earth and it dies; out of that seed, through its dying, a harvest comes. What is sown is bare grain; what issues from it is blade and stalk and ear. What is sown is a handful of seed; what comes from it is a waving field of golden corn. If the bare grain, through death, blossoms out into a harvest, is there anything inherently impossible in the belief that this material body may, through death, blossom out into a spiritual body?

(2) He points out, secondly, that God fits every one of His creatures for its own special environment. There is an inexhaustibility of creative power in God. "All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men and another of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fishes." God gives man a body that fits him for present conditions; He gives the bird a body that fits it for flight in the air; He gives the fish a body that fits it for its life in the sea. And not only are there these differences in material bodies, fitting them for their respective environments, but God can create bodies of an entirely different kind. "There are also celestial bodies, and there are bodies terrestrial." In view of this infinite variety of God's creative handiwork, is it difficult to believe that God can and will give to man in the eternal world a new body to fit him for the new conditions? That is Paul's answer. It is not an explanation. It is just the great venture of faith. "God giveth it a body," he says. He falls back on the limitless, creative power of God.

And yet this new spiritual body will be in

some strange and subtle way connected with the old. That is why the Apostle is so insistent that we should not sin against this physical body of ours lest, by so doing, we sin against our resurrection body. How this body of flesh is connected with the spiritual and glorified body is more than any one can tell. I often wonder whether we are really creating that spiritual body here and now—creating that spiritual envelope of the soul which shall afterwards be revealed as its true expression and instrument. We know that the soul does affect the body even here. The body is a gross and stubborn and unwieldy instrument, but the soul can and does mould and fashion it and subdue it to its own likeness. A gracious, pure, and holy soul stamps grace and purity and holiness on the lineaments of the face and the very movements of the body. And I have often wondered whether the spiritual body of the resurrection life may not be the garb which during these mortal years the soul has woven for itself.

Our Lord's body was changed after His Resurrection. It was not subject to natural

law. And yet there was obviously a connection between it and the body of the days of His flesh. It was so changed that the disciples did not at first recognise Him; but the identities were so deep and real that they always knew Him at the last. As I look through the stories, however, I seem to have it borne in upon me that the marks by which they recognised Him were certain characteristics which were really expressions of His soul. Mary, for instance, recognised Him by His voice; but it is the soul that speaks through the voice, and all the love of Jesus uttered itself in His tones. Thomas recognised Him by His Wounds; but our Lord's Wounds, again, reveal His heart. He bears them still; He will always bear them; they express His soul in its redeeming passion and sacrifice. The two disciples who journeyed to Emmaus recognised Him by His habit of saying grace; that again was an index to His soul, and was the expression of His constant and loving dependence on His Father. Our Lord's resurrection body was the real expression of His soul, that soul which the disciples had come to know and



love during the days of His earthly sojourn. May not all this convey to us some hint as to the nature of our resurrection body? It will be different from the body which now is. It will be freed from the limitations to which these earthly bodies of ours are subject. And yet there will be a real identity. Our mental and spiritual characteristics will reproduce themselves. We shall be recognisable. By our actions and conduct now we may be fashioning the features of the body which shall be. All this, after all, is only a perhaps. We have no sure word of prophecy to guide us. In the last resort we must be content to leave the matter where Paul left it—God will give us a body which shall be a fit instrument for the soul under the new conditions of the eternal world.

#### IV

But some one may ask, Why make such a fuss about the resurrection body? Is it not enough to know that we shall still be spiritually alive? Is not the immortality of the soul all that we need to care about? I should

be very far from wishing to make belief in the resurrection of the body a necessary article in one's creed, but there are three things, at any rate, which the belief does for us, and which constitute three strong reasons for holding to the full New Testament faith.

I ought perhaps to say that science places no bar in the way of our holding the New Testament belief in a future life of both body and spirit—that is, if Sir Oliver Lodge may be accepted as an authoritative exponent. He frankly says that “the dependence of the spiritual on a vehicle for manifestation is not likely to be a purely temporary condition; it is probably a sign or sample of something which has an eternal significance, a representation of some permanent truth.” I do not stay to discuss this statement. I only refer to it just to show that science as such has nothing to say against the New Testament conception of the future life. But even if science allows it, does it matter very much? What does the doctrine of the resurrection of the body really secure for us?

(1) It safeguards the truth of the permanence of personality and individuality. It is a question whether we can conceive of personality without an organism. Individuality almost involves limitation and definition. This doctrine of the resurrection of the body does that for us—it safeguards individuality. We shall not be merged and dissolved into some mysterious “All” of Being. We shall remain distinct and separate individualities, conscious of our personal existence. I shall remain I. You will remain you. The Eastern idea of immortality is that of absorption into some vast sea of being in which individual life for ever ceases; the Christian idea of immortality is that of personal and individual life raised to its very highest pitch. And of that individual, conscious, personal immortality, for which our souls hunger, this doctrine of the resurrection body is the safeguard.

(2) By safeguarding the fact of individuality, the doctrine of the resurrection of the body secures for us and guarantees to us the comfort of recognition. Men and women who have dear ones within the veil want to

know if, under the new conditions of the spiritual life, they will be able to recognise their loved and lost. This is not to be dismissed as sentiment—it is a deep and abiding craving of the soul. The attraction of heaven for multitudes is this, that with the breaking of the eternal morn those angel faces will smile, “which they have loved long since and lost awhile.” It is that hope that sustains fathers and mothers amid the surging sorrows of these terrible days. There are innumerable Rachels weeping for their children just now, and they would refuse to be comforted were it not for this blessed confidence that they shall see their dear lads again; and that they will be the same lads; that they will reproduce those very characteristics in the after life which they had learned to love in this. This truth of the resurrection of the body ratifies and guarantees that confidence. For heaven is not the abode of viewless, disembodied spirits. Every soul has its body. And just as the disciples knew their risen and glorified Lord, so you and I may be happily sure that we shall know our beloved dead who are in

Christ most gloriously alive. There will be the old familiar dearly loved "marks" to lead us to them.

(3) And, lastly, the doctrine of the resurrection of the body is an assertion of the fullness and richness and blessedness of the life beyond. Christ saves us with a complete salvation. He redeems us both body and soul. He does not save the soul by surrendering the body. The body of our humiliation is to be fashioned like unto His body of glory. It is to become the glorious and wonderful thing His own resurrection body was—the perfect instrument of a pure and holy soul. So it is no thin, meagre life we look for in the Beyond, but life rounded and complete. The disembodied spirits of the dead, as depicted for us in Greek song and story, led a poor, vague, shadowy kind of existence. It could scarcely be called life at all. But Christ gives the abundant life. He redeems man in the totality of his being. Nothing is lost, much is gained. For this body which is sown in corruption, is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;

it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. We do not come into heaven crippled and maimed, with certain elements of our nature sacrificed and left behind; we come into it as complete men, with every faculty both for service and enjoyment at its maximum, so that the life of the blessed becomes life indeed. What a prospect it opens out! There is much that remains in shadow. But enough has been revealed to make us exult in the thought of what lies ahead. We cannot at this moment think too gloriously of the condition of our dear ones who have "passed on." For even when we have thought and imagined our best, it still remains true that eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the minds of men the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.



## SHADOW AND SUBSTANCE

I MENTIONED in a previous chapter that the great object which the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews kept steadily in mind right through his epistle was that of making the Hebrew Christians, to whom he wrote it, feel that in exchanging Judaism for Christianity they had lost nothing but gained much. The first Christians, it is obvious from the opening chapters of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, felt no difficulty in combining their new faith in Christ with loyalty to the Jewish law. For many years the members of the Jerusalem church continued to attend the Temple services and had no sense of inconsistency in doing so. But there came a time when the incompatibility between the two systems became evident; when it became patent to all that the attempt to graft the new Christian faith on to Judaism was like trying to put a new patch on

to an old garment, or trying to pour new wine into old bottles. The unbelieving Jews—alarmed by the growth of the Gentile element in the Church—began to feel that the Christian faith was more than a heresy, that it was a menace to the very existence of Judaism, and so began in their synagogue the practice of solemnly cursing the Christians. And the Christian people on their part, influenced largely by the teaching of St. Paul, began to see that they could not continue to observe the Levitical ritual without obscuring some of the central truths of the Gospel. Before the end of the first century, a breach between Judaism and Christianity had become inevitable. No man could serve two religious masters. He could be a Jew, or he could be a Christian, but he could not be both.

This letter to the Hebrews was written to people who were confronted by that choice. It was no easy thing for them to cut themselves off from the Judaism in which they had been bred. In a previous chapter I referred to the sense of loss they felt at the surrender of the stately Temple worship.

They felt very much the same with reference to the Mosaic Law. Every Jew was brought up to regard the Law as Divine, the direct gift of God to the Jewish race, every jot and tittle of which was to be held as sacred. To surrender the Law, to abandon its precepts and rules as no longer obligatory upon them, meant the uprooting of all their most cherished ideas. It was not easily done. The writer of this letter seeks to help them by reminding them that the Law, after all, was only "the shadow of the good things to come, not the very image of the things," and that it was foolish to cling to the shadow when the substance was in their grasp.

And what exactly does he mean when he says the Law is a "shadow"? Something like this, I imagine. The Law was a true revelation of the will of God. Its precepts set forth what God demanded of men and expected from them. By fulfilling its precepts men might set themselves right with God, and by setting themselves right with God, set themselves right also with their own consciences. What St. Paul calls "righteousness" was the prospect and promise

held out by the Law, and in the train of righteousness "peace." But as a matter of fact the Law never fulfilled its promise. It never set a man right with God, for the simple reason that no man ever fulfilled its demands; and consequently, it never brought to any man peace of heart. The failure of the Law to bestow upon men either "righteousness" or "peace" is illustrated in St. Paul's own experience. With all the passion of his soul he set himself to observe every detail of the Law in order that he might put himself right with God. But he never succeeded. He was constantly coming short in one respect or another, so that the Law instead of bringing him peace brought him condemnation and despair. It was only the "shadow" of peace and reconciliation with God that St. Paul found in the Law. The reality, the "substance," was not in it. The Law pointed forward to something better than itself. All its ritual of sacrifice, all its offerings of bulls and goats (which could not take away sin) pointed forward to some more availing sacrifice. And the better thing

to which the Law pointed, Paul found in Christ and His Cross. In that great sacrifice he really found righteousness, reconciliation, peace. "Thanks be to God," he cries, "through Jesus Christ our Lord." The Law was but the "shadow" of good things to come; the "substance," the reality, the good thing itself, was in Christ.

Now this relation of "shadow" and "substance" holds true not only of Law and Gospel, but also of this life and the life to come, of earth and heaven. There is a vast amount of "shadow" in this life. There is much in it that is insubstantial and illusory. It does not fulfil its promises. It does not satisfy the hopes it raises. If life really ended at the grave we should have to write it down as an illusion pure and simple, a cheat, a mockery. But there is a great Beyond. The "substance" of the things we strive for is reserved for us there. "Heaven shall make perfect, earth's imperfect bliss." The "shadows" of this life are prophetic of realities in that life which is to come.

## I

There is scarcely need to emphasise the fact that there is a vast amount of "shadow" about this present life. There is much in it that is disappointing and illusory and almost deceptive. We grasp at certain things—happiness, success, fulness of life—and they elude us. When we achieve the objects of our ambition we find that we have grasped at shadows and that the real substance of success and happiness and fulness of life still escapes us. This idea of the illusive-ness of life is familiar enough. Readers of Plato will remember that the great Greek thinker conceives of the realities of things, the ideals and archetypes of things, as existing only in the upper world. It is only with the shadows cast by those realities that we are dealing down here. In a famous passage in his *Republic* he pictures the vast majority of men as prisoners in a subterranean cave, chained with their backs to a fire, and looking at the shadows cast by the fire on the rocky wall and mistaking them for realities. And real knowledge and wisdom, according



to the Greek philosopher, only begin when men turn away from these shadows and climb the steep sides of the cave and recognise that the real things are all in the upper world. The Greek sage, in this illustration of his, has set forth a great and abiding truth. In this world we are among the "shadows," the insubstantial and unreal things; the "substance" of the things we seek is in the world to come, and wisdom lies in remembering that the reality is always there.

For illustration of the shadowy, illusory character of the life which now is, let us take, first, the idea of *success*. Most men when they start out in life do so with the intention of making a "success" of it. Many, judging by the ordinary human standards, fail. A few, as we say, succeed. They make money. They win fame. They gain popularity and position. When they started their careers, they believed that in these things they would find a certain solid satisfaction. But when they actually gain possession of them, they find they have grasped at a shadow. "Here lies one," was Keats's

verdict on himself, though he had won enduring fame, "whose name was writ in water." Henry Martyn slaved away at his studies in Cambridge, feeling that if he could only win a high place in the Honours list he would have achieved real success. When the lists were published, his name stood first. He was Senior Wrangler. And when he saw his name there, instead of being overjoyed, the success seemed to him so empty, such a bubble, that he burst into tears. We do not reveal our emotions so plainly nowadays. But if we could see into the hearts of our so-called "successful" men, we should discover there a curious sense of disillusionment. Life seems to have mocked them. It has not given them what it promised. "Success" turns out to be but a "shadow."

Let us take for our second illustration the idea of *happiness*. We are all hungry for it, and we need not be in the least ashamed to confess it. But happiness has a tantalizing way of escaping us. There is a familiar picture in which Pleasure—depicted as an alluring but rather lascivious female figure—is represented as being pursued by a host

of devotees, whose grasp she always just manages to elude. The suggestion of the picture is that those who live for pleasure never really possess it. Every man who journeys into the far country in search of pleasure sooner or later always "begins to be in want." All that, of course, is just a commonplace of the moralists. But what I want to suggest is not simply that the professed pleasure seeker never gets the happiness he seeks—none of us does. Deep, unruffled, satisfied happiness, we none of us enjoy. Life is full of anxieties and fears. The very love that enriches us, exposes us also to infinite pain. I am not, of course, forgetting that we have our bright days. What I am suggesting is that our happiness is always uncertain, transient, illusory. It is not the real, solid thing we long for. It is the "shadow," not the "substance."

For a third illustration let us take *life* itself. We all want life. We were made for life and we long to possess it—real life with satisfaction for every faculty and energy, life with fulness and richness and zest in it.

But we do not get it. Some seem to get a fuller life than others, but no one seems to get the real thing. For some, life is cramped and fettered by circumstances. What do our slum dwellers and our very poor know about life? Men and women shut up in mean streets, who divide their time between grinding toil and heavy sleep, with perhaps a visit to the public house by way of variation—what do they know about life? For others, life is narrowed and impoverished by sickness. What do the crippled and the invalid know about life? For all of us life is marred and broken by loss and sorrow. And then death comes, sometimes late, sometimes tragically soon, and takes life clean away. What have the tens of thousands of young lads who have perished in this war known about life? No! we certainly do not get real life—the kind of life we long for—down here. Life for many, nay for all of us in turn, seems an empty and hollow thing. All the zest and effervescence go out of it. It is the merest “shadow” of what we mean by life, not the “substance” of it.

## II

No doubt it is true that the illusory character of life has its compensating advantages. It serves the Divine purpose. It is one of God's methods of educating the race. It lies, for instance, at the root of a good deal of our progress. If men were satisfied when they attained their first ambitions there would be an end of all advancement. Men would settle down into a placid and sheep-like content. But when they find that the success at which they aimed turns out to be a mere shadow, an empty, insubstantial thing, they are stirred to seek for something higher and better. The men who seek the heights are spurred to their endeavours by the fact that on the lower levels they found no satisfaction or peace.

And this same sense of illusoriness weans men from loving this world over-much. It has been ordained of God to do this. If men found the real success and the real happiness and the real life they seek for in this world they would not want any other. They would settle down here. They would make

their portion in this life and never give a thought to, or spare a desire for, the life beyond. But this sense of unreality and disappointment, this sense of emptiness and futility, comes to us to save us from the fate of the materialist and to remind us that we really belong to a better country, even the heavenly. By the very fact that the success and happiness and life we snatch at turn out to be but "shadows," God says to us, "Arise, this is not your rest," and we are impelled to seek the "good things to come," of which earth's shadows are the prophecy and the promise. The illusoriness of life has without doubt its part to play in the discipline and education of the soul.

But illusion is not the last word. That is the mistake those people make who confine their gaze to this life. That is why the "disillusioned" man is usually a bitter and cynical man. For there is every excuse for cynicism and bitterness if this life is all. If I confine my view to what happens between the cradle and the grave, I can understand why Heine talked of God as a great Aristophanes; I can understand Thomas Hardy's



talk about "life's little ironies"; I can sympathise with his bitter speech about the "President of the Immortals" having his "sport" with men. If the grave is the end I can understand people asking the question, "Is life worth while?" I can understand the pessimists who declare that the best boon that can come to a man is an early death. For life viewed simply as stretching between the cradle and the grave is ironic; it is a cheat, a fraud, and a delusion. What can be said of an existence in which men seek success and find no satisfaction in it; in which they pursue pleasure and find it turns to bitterness and gall; in which they seek life and never get it—what can be said of such an existence except what Koheleth said savagely of it long centuries ago, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity and a striving after wind"? But the grave is not the end, and therefore illusion is not the last word. There is a reality over against every illusion; there is a fulfilment over against every disappointment; and the "shadows" of earth—the success, the happiness, the life which we find so

empty and insubstantial here—are prophetic of good things to come.

### III

“Coming events cast their shadows before,” we say. And the success and happiness of life which we seek on earth, and find to be so disappointing and unreal, are just the “shadows” of the real success, and the real happiness and the real life which await us in the world to come. I have been emphasising the fact that life is full of illusion, that its promises are not fulfilled. But it is one of the axioms of our thinking about God that He is a God of truth. God is not a man that He should lie. He does not cheat or deceive men. He does not mislead or betray them. He does not plant an instinct in the soul in order to disappoint and mock it. God must keep His word. He must be true. If He plants the instinct for success and happiness and life in the human heart, it must be because He means to satisfy them. Every instinct is prophetic of its own fulfilment. God gives men the faculty of vision, and

there is a beautiful world for the eye to see. God gives man the faculty of hearing, and there is a whole world of ravishing sounds to listen to. God gives man the faculty of love, and there are other human beings and God Himself for him to love. In exactly the same way He has planted in the heart of man this instinct, this hunger for achievement, for happiness, for life. Our present existence certainly does not give these things to us. But, just because God is a God of truth, they must be waiting for us somewhere. And so they are! The unsatisfying success, the marred and broken happiness, the half-empty life of earth, are just "shadows" of the good things to come. They point forward to a solid success, a perfect happiness, an abundant life in the Great Beyond. The reality and substance of the things we hope for and strive for are there.

(a) Our partial and unsatisfying successes are the "shadow" of a real success to come. Part of the tragedy of life is that it does not bring us the success we seek. We do not achieve. We go down to the dust with tasks unfinished and ideals unrealised. But

the world to come is the place of achievement and realisation. One of the reasons which has most imperiously driven men to demand an immortality is this sense of life's incompleteness. When great men have been cut off in the midst of their years, when Lycidas dies "ere his prime," the human heart resolutely refuses to believe that life can be wantonly wasted in that way, and demands another world in which these men may continue their work and achieve the great things that were possible to them. And this instinct of the heart is right. The attempts and partial achievements of earth are "shadows" of good things to come. The singer shall sing the song that was in his heart though it never came to his lips. The poet shall write the glowing things which were in his mind but for which, on earth, he could find no words. The artist shall paint the picture which gleamed before his imagination, but which never got put on canvas. The ambitions our youth set before themselves—nipped in the bud as they have been for thousands of them by premature death—have not been finally thwarted. In fairer realms and under

brighter skies, everything that was true and worthy in them will fulfil itself: "On earth the broken arcs, in heaven the perfect round." And this best achievement of all awaits us in the world to come, the achievement of a holy character. We strive and fail down here. The success that even the very best of men meet with is an unsatisfying one. "Not that I have already obtained or am already perfect," says St. Paul. But our strivings and endeavours are "shadows" of the good things to come. Effort here is to become achievement there. Aspiration here is to become attainment there. "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

(b) Our broken and interrupted happiness is prophetic of a real happiness to come. Happiness is not an illusion pure and simple. The happiness we get on earth is more or less "shadowy." But real, solid, abiding happiness awaits us in the Life Beyond. The hunger of the heart is not to be disappointed. "In His presence there is fulness of joy; at His right hand there are pleasures for evermore." The things that mar our happiness down here are to be taken away. Sin is to

vex our peace no more. Death and sorrow are to be strangers to us, and God shall wipe away all tears from off our faces. Above all, we shall enjoy the Beatific Vision. We shall see God face to face, and with the vision of God the hungry soul will be abundantly satisfied. "Man never is, but always to be blessed," says the poet. He never *is* blessed. His happiness is never complete down here. But he is *to be* blessed. The broken and intermittent happinesses of earth are "shadows" of a better and perfect happiness to come.

(c) Our narrow and crippled lives are prophetic of full and abundant life to come. Life does not end at the grave. It begins there to get its chance. We are all of us to get the kind of life we want—life with zest and fulness and richness in it. This poor mortal life of ours which never satisfies us because it is so cramped and fettered in multitudes of ways is just the "shadow" of the good thing to come. I like that word which I see sometimes on memorial cards, "Entered into life." That is the right expression! "Died" is a pagan word. Our dead



have really entered into life. The desire for life beat strongly in the breasts of those lads of ours who have gone forth to fight our battles for us. They wanted great life, high life, heroic life. Many of them have fallen. But let us not unduly grieve for them. They have found the life they wanted. "He that loseth his life for my sake, the same shall find it." And they have found it—life at the maximum, life that never palls or stales, life replete with interest and zest! It is only the "shadow" of life we have down here; *they* have the life which is life indeed.

There are good things to come, so let us be of good cheer both for ourselves and for those whom we love. There is real achievement, real happiness, and real life in store for us. Life is not all illusion and emptiness and disappointment. Its longings and aspirations are not a mockery and fraud. It is quite true that we do not get the reality of the things we desire down here—only the "shadows" of them. But God will not disappoint us. "All we have hoped or dreamed of good" shall be ours in the life that waits for us when this life is done.

There is a sea, a quiet sea,  
    Beyond the farthest line,  
    Where all my ships that went astray,  
    And all my dreams of yesterday,  
And all the things that were to be,  
    Are mine!

There is a land, a quiet land,  
    Beyond the setting sun,  
    Where every task in which I quailed,  
    And all wherein my courage failed,  
Where all the good my spirit planned,  
    Is done!

There is a hope, a quiet hope,  
    Within my heart instilled,  
    That if undaunted on I sail,  
    The guiding star shall never pale,  
But shine within my labour's scope,  
    Fulfilled!

And there's a tide, a quiet tide,  
    Flowing towards a goal,  
    That sweeps by every humble shore,  
    And at its fullest ebbs no more,  
And on that final swell shall ride,  
    My soul!

## AT THE LONG LAST

**I**N all the preceding chapters of this volume I have had believing men and women in view throughout. It is of what lies in store for them on the other side of the grave that I have tried to write. For those who fall asleep in Christ we do not sorrow as those who have no hope. Within the Christian circle the sorrow is not for those who go, but for those who remain. For those who go we rejoice with joy exceeding and full of glory, for they go to be with Christ which is far better.

But what of those who are not “in Christ”? What happens to them? What awaits them on the other side the grave? This is a question that cannot be brushed aside or ignored. For those who are not “in Christ” are a vast host. Three-quarters of the missionary map of the world are still coloured black. The great majority of the human race are clean outside the Christian

faith. And, in addition to the dim millions of heathenism, there are the multitudes of careless, indifferent, irreligious folk at home. We speak of England as a Christian country. But the majority of English people are not really Christian at all. The real Christians are a tiny minority. The great multitude ignore and reject Christ and repudiate His rule. What has the future got in store for these? The Great War has made this question an acute and urgent one for great numbers of people. For of the lads who so freely sacrifice their lives for us, only a few are definitely religious, only a few are consciously and deliberately serving Christ. There is nothing approaching a revival of religion at the front. Our soldiers have got the spirit of sacrifice in them, but for the most part they are gay, careless, irresponsible lads, quite innocent of anything like serious religion. Sorrowing parents by the thousand are wondering what has become of these gay, careless, but beloved sons of theirs. They want to know if they can cherish any hope for them. Well, can they? Those who have fallen asleep in Christ, says

the Apostle, have not perished. What of those who have *not* fallen asleep in Christ? It is to the discussion of that poignant question I would address myself in this chapter. I have more than once said that the whole subject of the Beyond ought to be discussed with reverence and reserve. But nowhere are reticence and reserve more necessary than in the discussing of this particular aspect of the question. Dogmatism, out of place everywhere, is doubly out of place here. Upon the fate of the unconverted there is no sure word of prophecy. We have to walk by faith, not by sight. From a consideration of the general drift of Scripture, and especially from the consideration of the character of God as a redeeming God, we may gather certain hints and suggestions and be encouraged to cherish certain venturesome and dazzling hopes: but with suggestions not dogmatic assertions, with hopes not assurances we must learn to be content.

Perhaps I can best start this discussion by laying down two broad positions which are common ground to all believing people.

The first is this, it is only in and through

Christ men get the eternal life. He is the Door. The kingdom of heaven is opened *to all believers*. He that hath the Son hath the life, he that hath not the Son hath not the life. To say, as some have been saying, that all who fall in battle pass straight into Paradise, is sheer Mahomedanism. The uniform testimony of Holy Writ is that Salvation comes to men through Christ and Christ alone.

The second is this, the future life is associated with the idea of penalty and punishment as surely as it is with that of reward and blessedness. There has been a tendency of recent years to ignore the solemn fact of judgement and to be silent about "hell" and "the outer darkness" and "the wrath of the Lamb." But judgement is a necessity in a moral world. If Scripture had said nothing about "hell" we should have to create one to satisfy our instinct for justice and to import some sort of moral meaning into life. To speak (as we have been rather apt to do) as if all men at death entered the blessed life, as if there were one event to the evil and the good is to be guilty of the final heresy, for it



is to demoralise the universe and to dethrone the Holy God. We sin against souls when we pretend that all is well with men whether they have been good or bad. All is not well with them. Just because God is God, and this world is a moral world, sin and evil must receive their fitting punishment. Was it not to save us from that "death" which is the wages of sin that Jesus died? To pretend that sin brings no dread consequences in its train is equivalent to saying that the Cross was wholly superfluous and that Jesus died for nought.

Any discussion of the destiny of those who have not accepted Christ must start with the acceptance of these two positions if it means to be in any sort of harmony with New Testament teaching. Starting then from these two truths as our premises, have we the right to cherish any hope for those who have passed out of life apparently unrepentant and unregenerate and unbelieving? Or must we say that, at death, every man's fate is definitely, finally, and irrevocably sealed? This latter has been the belief held by most Evangelical Christians. They

have believed, they think the New Testament shuts them up to the belief, that this life is man's testing time, that God's offer of mercy holds good only during these mortal years, that once men find themselves in the outer darkness with the door closed against them, there they are doomed to dwell for ever because the door never opens again. That is a stern, not to say a harsh, creed, and if it be true, it condemns multitudes of people in our midst to heartbreak and despair, and adds a new and terrible bitterness to sorrows already sufficiently bitter. For although we may cherish the hope that in those tense moments which precede an attack, holy memories may come crowding into the mind, and many a lad may bethink himself of his Saviour and find "life for a look"; and although, as Dr. Salmond reminds us, we cannot tell what the actual experience of death may do for men—yet these are but suppositions which do not avail to bring solid comfort to stricken souls. Can we offer nothing but guesses and "perhapes" of this kind for their consolation? Must we subscribe to

the creed that as the tree falls so it lies, and that if a man is outside the fold of Christ at the moment of his death, outside he must remain to all eternity? Does the door, once closed, remain closed?

Let it be at once and quite frankly admitted that those who believe that the New Testament teaches everlasting punishment can quote many a verse in support of their contention. But a question of this kind cannot be settled by the quotation of isolated proof-texts. For the testimony of Scripture is not consistent and uniform, and verses which seem to point in one direction can be met and countered by verses which seem to point in the other. The matter must be decided by the general character of the Christian revelation and in accordance with the Christian conception of God as a loving and redeeming as well as a Holy God. Isolated texts may seem to slam the door in our faces, but in the light of the Christian revelation as a whole, and especially in the light of the knowledge of the glory of God which is given to us in the face of Jesus Christ, we

may feel that even our valley of Achor contains a door of hope. And that hope is this, that even after death God does not cease to deal with the human soul, that neither death nor life can separate men from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The idea of probation in a future life is perhaps not congenial to Protestants. The Roman Catholic doctrine of Purgatory has made it repugnant to us. That doctrine had become a source of such measureless abuse that at the Reformation our fathers ruthlessly cast it out. But there was a truth at the heart of it, and that truth we must recover. Whether there be an Intermediate State or not matters little: what *does* matter is that on the other side of death the souls of men are still in the hands of God, He still deals with them, penitence remains still possible, and before the penitent there is set not a closed door but a door ajar. It is not in isolated texts we find our warrant for cherishing such a hope as this, but in certain attributes of the character of God.

## I

It is warranted, in the first place, by our faith in the justice of God. The Judge of all the earth must do right. Now the doctrine that all who have not accepted Christ during their earthly life are doomed to everlasting punishment offends our sense of justice. For vast millions have never had the chance of accepting Him, for the simple reason that they have never heard of Him. A little over a hundred years ago, when the modern missionary enterprise was in its infancy, our fathers used to try to stir up the zeal of Christian people by reminding them that with every tick of the clock so many thousand heathen passed into the outer darkness. No one uses that argument nowadays. It has ceased to move men because they have ceased to believe it. If it moved men at all, it would be not so much to pity for the heathen as to resentment against the injustice of a God who could condemn men to eternal death for not believing in a Christ of whom they had never heard. But no one says any such thing in these days. We have come

to realise that to assert anything of the kind is an impeachment of the justice of God. No one now believes that the millions of heathen folk who have never heard of Christ are doomed for ever to the outer darkness. They are to be punished, according to our Lord's own word, with "few stripes." Theirs is certainly not an eternal punishment. In the next life these people who have never heard of Christ in this life are to come face to face with Him and to have their chance. As much as that seems to be demanded if the character of God as a just God is to be conserved.

But if we allow that God deals with the heathen after death, is not the idea that death irrevocably settles destiny destroyed? Is not the principle conceded that after death men may still find the open door? For, if a second chance is given to the heathen, why not also to these in our own midst whose chances during life have been less than fair? Multitudes of these brave lads who have died for us have, religiously, never had a fair chance. They had no advantages in their upbringing, they were not helped by



godly example, many of them never knew of Christ except in caricature. Are these lads to have no second chance? Before they are condemned for rejecting Christ, must they not at any rate have the chance of seeing Him as He truly is? Death cannot finally and eternally settle destiny. Respect for the justice of God impels us to demand for the ignorant millions of heathenism, and for the ignorant of our own land, some opportunity of really knowing Christ. Which again means that on the other side of death as on this, God is still dealing with human souls, and penitence and pardon are still possible.

## II

Our belief in the continued dealing of God with the souls of men is warranted in the second place by our faith in the love of God. And our faith in the love of God inspires us with a still greater and more daring hope than does our faith in the justice of God. For while our faith in the justice of God compels us to believe that He will give every one a fair chance, our faith in His love war-

rants us in believing He will give another chance even to those who have had their chance and neglected it. The consideration of God's justice constrains us to believe that on the further side of death He will give an opportunity to the ignorant, but the consideration of His love inspires us with the hope that He will give further opportunity to all. God is Love, says St. John. Love is His essential character. And it is uttermost love. He loves to the end. You must never say of God that He "loved once." His love never fails. When He loves, He loves for ever. And it is not only an uttermost love, it is also an individual love. He loves, not simply the mass, but the unit. He calls His own sheep by name. He is the Father, and He knows and loves every one of His children. And it is a redeeming love. It goes out to seek and save. In its passion to save, it stooped to the Cross. God is all that—individual, uttermost, redeeming love. Now, the question that confronts us is this, Does a man's death make a change in God's attitude towards him? The man still lives—has God ceased to love him? Has the Father

ceased to yearn for His child? That child is suffering all the woes and penalties of sin—has the passion to redeem died out of the heart of God? Will not God be love on the other side of death as on this? And if He is still infinite and uttermost love, will He not yonder as here be ever going out to seek and to save? The question is really one of the character of God. Death cannot irrevocably settle destiny, for death cannot change the love of God into indifference. In the next life, as in this, His love will impel Him to seek and to save that which is lost. “Neither death nor life shall be able to separate us from the love of God.”

All this is in harmony with the teaching of our Lord. Three of His most exquisite and familiar parables were spoken in order to illustrate the persistence of God’s seeking love. The woman who lost one of her ten pieces of silver lit a candle and swept the house and sought diligently till she found it. The shepherd who had lost one of his hundred sheep went out into the wilderness and searched the mountains until he found it. The father who had lost a son scanned daily

the road by which the lad had travelled when he left home, and never knew what happiness meant until one day, while he was yet a long way off, he saw him on his way back.

God's love—such is the great lesson Christ would have us learn—is a love that never falters or faints or fails until it finds. And death makes no difference to Him. My very conception of God as Love, forbids me to think that He can be heedless and happy in His glory so long as there are children of His in the outer darkness. Christ, Peter says, went and preached to the spirits in prison. Spite of all the difficulties the commentators raise, there is no explanation so natural and likely as that which construes this to mean that Christ went to preach His Gospel of Grace to those who, in the days of their flesh, missed their chance. The Love of God, that is to say, in the eternal world as in this, is a seeking and redeeming love. The lost coin, the lost sheep, the lost son—man is all that to God, and He seeks for him until He finds him. Death cannot finally and irrevocably settle destiny. God has not done with men when they die. He continues to

call and plead and woo. "How can I give thee up, Ephraim?" He never gives up. And whoso listens to His voice and responds to His pleading finds the door into the King's halls not shut but open.

### III

Respect both for the justice and love of God constrains us to believe that in the next life as in this He will continue to deal with the souls of men. But what is to be the issue of this dealing? Have we any warrant for believing that the results of God's dealings with men in the next life will be different from the results we see in this? God's love may continue to seek and to plead, but *may* not man continue to resist? This question is really a question as to what is to happen at the long last, what is to be the final goal and issue of things. It is a comfort to know that death does not finally settle things. But the really effectual consolation would be to know that at the long last all lost things would be found, and that "evening would bring us all home." Have we any right to

cherish so daring a hope as that? Once again, it behoves any one who discusses such a theme as this to tread softly and speak diffidently. At the same time, there seem to me to be reasons for asserting that Scripture looks forward to a time when God's victory shall be complete, and Christ's joy shall be full, because sin shall be utterly destroyed, and the universe shall be perfectly restored and every man shall be saved.

We must remember that Christ's purposes of salvation embraced the world. He "died for all"—not for some section of humanity, but for the total race. "He is the propitiation for our sins," says St. John, "and not for ours only, but also for the whole world." Christ by dying won redemption for the world. The Cross is a completed victory; it is a finished work. In that death, the emancipation price for the whole world was paid. The world and every one in it became by that act Christ's purchased possession. And is Christ likely to see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied so long as any section of this world which He has redeemed continues to lie in the Evil One, so long as a



single man for whom He died remains in bondage to sin? Will Christ be satisfied until He sees all the souls for which He died actually His own?

It is this cosmic aspect of the Cross of Christ that inspires St. Paul with certain daring and splendid hopes about the long last to which he gives expression in his epistles. It is God's good pleasure, he says in one place, "to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things in the earth." That verse recognises that the universe as it at present exists is a marred and disordered universe. But God is not satisfied that the world which He has made should remain disordered; it is His will and purpose to "recapitulate" it, to restore it to its right lines, to repair it into something more than its original beauty, in Christ. Now this is a tremendous statement, involving as it does the creation of a new moral order. Paradise has been lost from our world, but Paradise is to be restored. The world is to become what God meant it to be. In spite of all the tragedies and wrongs of such a time as this, evil is not to be domi-

nant in this world. It is God's will and purpose to reconstruct it. The one absolutely sure thing the future contains is this—all things are to become new, and right, and fair, and beautiful, and true, because it is God's good pleasure to recapitulate all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things in the earth.

Such a sentence as that seems to give evil no inch of foothold in a redeemed and restored universe. The world, at last, is to answer perfectly to God's design and intention for it. As it stands, it seems to suggest that at the long last all men and all things will be restored in Christ, that every wanderer will at length be found, and every lost son will find His way home. In other words, in such a verse, St. Paul seems to be prophesying something like universal restoration. Have we any right to take the words in what appears to be their obvious sense? Dr. Dale warns us against building a great superstructure of belief upon an isolated text. It would be as foolish to do that, he says, as it would be to assume that any particular sermon contained the whole of a

preacher's belief. The warning is one we need to observe. We have no right to base great dogmas upon detached passages. To get at the Apostolic and New Testament view, Scripture must be compared with Scripture. But, so far as Paul is concerned, this passage certainly does not stand alone. I am not sure that this was not the glorious hope that Paul consistently cherished about the ultimate end. When he thinks of that end, it is always as bringing with it the triumph of Christ and an obedient universe. He is to subject all things to Himself, he says in 1 Corinthians, so that God may be all in all. He is to have in all things the pre-eminence, he says in Colossians, and is to reconcile to God all things in heaven and on earth. In Christ's name, he says in Philip-pians, every knee is to bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and every tongue is to confess that He is Lord. The final extirpation of evil, the complete triumph of Christ, the restoration of all things—that was the end which Paul in vision foresaw. And I do not think that there is any real and irrecon-

cileable antagonism between this sublime hope of complete victory and those stern and solemn verses which speak of judgement. The judgement of sin is a dread certainty. Belief in the ultimate restitution of all things does not abolish the reality of hell. Punishment must last as long as sin lasts. But the question is, Will sin last? Are men going to be rebellious and disobedient for ever and ever? Are the fires of punishment going to have no effect upon them?

Now the mere fact that man possesses a free will is in itself almost sufficient to make positive assertions of universal restoration impossible, for who is to say that on the other side, as on this, man may not use his freedom to resist God? At the same time, we cannot conceive of a sort of kingdom of evil challenging for ever the sovereignty of God. The ultimate issue of things is a universe in which God is all in all, a universe in which all things bow the knee to Christ. I think Scripture is fairly clear on that point. But such a universe can only come into being either by the destruction of all rebellious persons and powers, or by their conversion

and restoration. Dr. Dale himself felt this difficulty, and so he was driven to accept the doctrine of annihilation. But against that doctrine the human soul revolts. We instinctively refuse to believe that God made the soul only to destroy it at the last. If we are shut up to the acceptance either of Annihilation or Universal Restoration, the Christian soul will choose the latter. Indeed, there is not one of us who does not hope that it is true. It solves so many difficulties for us. We can bear the disappointments, the sorrows, the unanswered prayers of life if only we can believe that at the last God will bring all home. If that is the far-off divine event to which the whole creation moves, then the sufferings and pain of the present hour become tolerable and rational.

And it does more than solve our difficulties—it is congruous with the character of God. He is the Father—will He ever abandon a child of His? And He is Sovereign—is He going to be defeated? For every unsaved man represents to that extent the defeat of God's purpose. Will not God make His holy will effectual, and, though it be

after millenniums of discipline and purifying flame ultimately bring men to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus? Perhaps, as Dr. Paterson says, the doctrine of the Sovereignty will be restored to its rightful place because we realise that it warrants this glorious and blessed hope. No, I do not dogmatise. But I cherish the hope that God “unmakes but to remake the soul”:

That not one life shall be destroy'd,  
Or cast as rubbish to the void,  
When God hath made the pile complete.

Hell is a dread and terrible reality. But sin and death and hell are themselves to be destroyed. Their prisoners are to be rescued. Christ's triumph is to be complete. He is to see of the travail of His soul and to be satisfied. God's holy purpose will be fulfilled, and that purpose is—in the fulness of time to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things in the earth.



## THE OPEN DOOR

**B**EHOLD," says the Exalted Lord to the tiny church at Philadelphia, "I have set before thee a door opened." I have no doubt at all that Sir William Ramsay is right when he says that the "opened door" refers to the exceptional opportunities for Christian service which its geographical position had put in the way of the church at Philadelphia. Philadelphia, the great traveller tells us, lay at the head of a long valley which opened up from the sea. Just beyond Philadelphia was the great plateau that formed the vast mass of the interior of Asia Minor. The trade route from Smyrna and the coast passed through Philadelphia, so that standing as it did almost at the foot of the central plateau, just where the great road began to ascend, Philadelphia became the keeper of the gateway into the hinterland of Asia Minor, the door by which travellers and traders passed into the towns and

cities of the Phrygian country. And this geographical situation gave Philadelphia exceptional opportunities for Christian service. All Phrygia was open to it. It held the key to that immense Asiatic interior. Its preachers could pass without let or hindrance into its cities and towns. Other churches were not so favourably placed. Fields for missionary labour did not lie so close at hand. But as for Philadelphia, there was an immense field for service at its very gate. "Behold," said the Lord of the Church, "I have set before thee a door opened."

And might He not say exactly the same thing to the Church to-day? In normal times there was an "open door" before us. We had vast opportunities for service. There was an "open door" for us at home. There are multitudes of people at home who are careless, indifferent, irreligious. The majority of the people are clean outside all the churches. "What a fine field! What a fine field!" Dr. Guthrie was heard to say as he looked down from one of the Edinburgh bridges over the crowded closes and wynds

that formed part of his parish. And God had provided a fine field for His Church here in Britain. There was here, ready to our hands, an opportunity for service that would give full scope to all our enthusiasm and energy. Then there was an "open door" for us abroad. In the early days of the missionary movement the great prayer our fathers used to offer was the prayer for "open doors," because vast countries like India and China were practically closed against the Christian missionary and his message. But the prayer for "open doors" had become superfluous. Every door had in the course of the decades become open to us. What the Church needed was grace and courage and faith to take advantage of the great opportunities offered to her. From every part of the world the cry kept coming, "Give us your Christ." God had verily set before His Church an "open door."

All this was true of the Church in normal times. It is doubly true in these times of calamity and distress. The Church of Christ has such an opportunity just now as only comes at rare intervals. Our lads who have

faced the issues of life and death on the battlefield have thereby been prepared to listen to the great Gospel the Church has to preach. Fathers and mothers who have been bereaved of their sons are waiting for the proclamation of that Jesus who is the Resurrection and the Life. The whole order of society is in the melting-pot and is waiting for the Church to take it in hand and to fashion it into a fabric nobler and fairer and juster than that which has perished in this terrible world-upheaval. It is the great day of the Church's opportunity. Never, in our time, has there been such a day of almost infinite possibility. "Behold," says the Lord to His Church, "I have set before thee a door opened."

In this chapter, however, I want to take the liberty of treating this word about the "open door" as our blessed Lord's message of hope not to the Church but to the individual. And in so employing the phrase, I am surely not putting it to any unjustifiable use. For, from one point of view, our Lord's Gospel to men might be described as the Gos-

pel of the Open Door. It is the Gospel of hope and recovery and opportunity. By it Christ comes to men and women who find themselves confronted by what look like the closed doors of difficulty and sin and death, and says to them, "Behold, I have set before thee a door *opened*." There are numbers of people in our world very much in the condition in which Christian and Hopeful found themselves when they lay in the dungeon of Giant-Despair. They are imprisoned and chained by their own doubts and fears. Death seems sometimes to them to be better than a life which contains no gleam of hope. But, then, death too is dark and forbidding and terrible. And all the time their fears and their despairs are of their own creating. Doubting Castle is no impregnable castle. It is a castle without a single door to it. Or if it has a door, it is only the kind of door to which, as Christian discovered, every believer carries a key. From the inmost dungeon there is a way out into the open air and the light of day. Our Lord came to proclaim the opening of pris-

ons to them that are bound. His message to men and women, crippled, terrified, bound by their own doubts and fears, is this: "Behold, I have set before thee a door opened."

There are many things in life which seem to confront us with "closed doors"—as, for instance, sickness, and sin, and, above everything else, death. Sickness seems to close the door of usefulness; sin seems to close the door of holiness; death seems to close the door of life itself. But our Lord refuses to subscribe to the doctrine of the closed door. "I am the Door," He cries. And it is always an open door. There is always a way out. Where the world sees nothing but deprivation He sees opportunity. Out of sickness and weariness He opens a door into usefulness and power; out of sin He opens a door into liberty and recovered holiness; out of death He opens a door into larger and richer life. Even in face of sickness and sin and despair Christ preaches His Gospel of high courage and hope. "Behold," He cries, "I have set before thee a door opened."



## I

Let me take, first of all, the matter of sickness and physical weakness. It is not quite on the same plane as the other two things of which I shall speak. Still, it is one of those experiences which seem to spell deprivation and the curtailment of opportunity. To multitudes of men and women sickness means a "closed door." Now, I am not going to be so blind to all the facts of life as to deny that sickness, physical disability, does close many a door. Who can see a lad blind or lame without feeling a profound pity for him? His blindness, or his lameness, as the case may be, shuts him out of most of the sports and pastimes in which boys take the keenest delight. The war has left us with thousands of disabled soldiers. They constitute a great State problem and responsibility, for the simple reason that their injuries have made their chosen careers impossible to them. There is no denying all this. Sickness and physical disability do mean deprivation and curtailment of opportunity.

But they do not close the door of usefulness upon men. Some of the most magnificent lives the world has ever witnessed have been lived in spite of crippling disabilities. Milton wrote the mightiest epic which the English language contains when he was stone blind. Helen Keller is blind and deaf and dumb. Touch is practically the only sense left to her. If ever a woman seemed to be shut in by "closed doors," Helen Keller was that one. But by means of her hands—to all intents and purposes her hands alone—she has risen clear above her imprisoning disabilities. She knows her friends, she knows books, she welcomes the spring, she loves the flowers, she understands what is taking place about her. Blind, deaf, dumb though she is, her hand has set before her an "open door" into a life not only of happiness but of service as well.

There is no more fervid and great-hearted preacher of the "open door" in this sense than Robert Louis Stevenson. And he himself illustrates the gospel he preaches. "Cling to what is left," is his message, "make the best of what remains." There

did not seem to be very much left for him, but what splendid use he made of it! His whole life was one long struggle against illness. He went to Bournemouth, to the South of France, to California, and at last to the South Seas in search of health. Many a man, stricken as he was, would have resigned himself to the invalid's life. But Stevenson refused to regard the door of usefulness as closed against him. He refused to succumb to the attacks of illness. He declined to yield to invalidism. With splendid courage he addressed himself to his appointed task. "I have written," he said in a letter to George Meredith, "in bed, and written out of it, written in hemorrhages, written in sickness, written torn by coughing, written when my head swam for weakness." When an attack of hemorrhage constrained him to carry his right hand in a sling, he wrote some of his *Child's Garden of Verses* with his left. When another attack left him so prostrate that he dared not speak, he dictated a novel in the deaf-and-dumb alphabet. When, at thirty-nine years of age, writer's cramp added itself to his other trou-

bles, he continued to write, using his step-daughter, Mrs. Strong, as his amanuensis. The result of it all was that Robert Louis Stevenson lived as fruitful and helpful a life as almost any literary man of the last century. He has enriched the world. Spite of his incessant struggle with sickness and pain, which made his existence a kind of daily dying, Stevenson found life offered him an "open door."

And if sickness and physical infirmity do not close the door to a career, they certainly do not close it to a life of moral and religious helpfulness and service. The best things are still open, even to maimed and crippled men; and to the attainment of these best things physical limitation may prove not a hindrance but a help. "Let us rejoice in our tribulations," says the Apostle Paul, "knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience probation, and probation hope." And in that sentence the Apostle has expressed the Christian experience of the centuries. Physical limitations are no barrier to religious usefulness. They do not hinder the attainment of a holy character.

They rather help it. If they are borne in the strength and power of Christ they set before men an "open door" to gentleness and purity and sympathy. One of the best men I ever knew was a man who from his twentieth year had been a confirmed invalid. This is what his death certificate had upon it: "Phthisis, twenty-three years." He was never able to share in the services of Christ's Church. He spent his winters in bed. The utmost he was able to do in the way of exertion was to go out in a bath-chair occasionally on a warm summer's day. But what a man he was, and what a ministry he exercised! A sunnier, happier Christian it was never my privilege to meet. Every visit I paid to him was a means of grace to me. He refreshed my soul and strengthened my hand in God. He commended his gospel by living it. Invalid though he was, he found that the best things and the noblest service were still possible for him. Christ set before him a "door opened."

Let us rejoice in these difficult days in the remembrance of this truth. Thousands and tens of thousands of men have had their ca-

reers cut short. The avocations they had chosen have become impossible to them owing to the injuries they have been called upon to suffer. But the best thing of all, and the finest service of all are still open to them. The best thing at which a man can aim is a holy character: the noblest service is the service of God. No matter what crippling disabilities men suffer from, these great things are still possible to them. They may be strong in faith. They may be mighty in prayer. They may be sources of blessing and healing to a stricken world. They may be conformed to the image of God's Son. "Behold," says our Lord, "I have set before thee a door opened."

## II

Let me illustrate the truth, further, in the matter of sin. In a far more awful way than sickness, sin seems to stand for a closing of the door. It seems to close the door upon the vision of God's face; it seems to close the door upon the possibility of a holy life. It seems to shut us out of the favour of God



and the hope of glory. And let there be no mistake about it—sin does both these things. Sin does shut us out of the favour of God. “The wrath of God” is no figure of speech. And sin does put holiness beyond our reach. For sin is more than an act, it is a power, and we become its slaves and victims so that, like Paul, we cannot do the things that we would. It is not the Christian faith alone that says all this about sin. Science says it too. With remorseless insistence Science preaches the fact and power of sin. The difference between Science and the Christian faith is this, that while Science preaches sin and has nothing to say about forgiveness, the Christian Gospel speaks of pardon and recovery. Science insists upon the closed door; Christ’s message to every man involved in the fear and bondage of sin is this, “Behold, I have set before thee a door opened.” This is indeed the very kernel of the Christian message. The Gospel is essentially a Gospel for a world of sin. It is a message of hope and comfort for those who, because of their sin, feel they are shut out of the Father’s love and the possibility of a

holy life. Its message to such is, "There is a way back"—back to the Father's home and bosom, back to the lost heights of purity. Judaism said, "This people that knoweth not the law is accursed." It confronted men with the "closed door." Jesus' message to lost, despairing, sinful men and women was and is this, "Behold, I have set before thee a door opened."

There is an "open door" back to the Father's heart and home. The world is slow to forgive. It insists upon binding man and his sin together. This was the apology a criminal, who had spent twenty-three years of his life in prison, made for himself, "After my first offence I never had a chance." Very likely the man's complaint was justified. When a man once falls away from respectability and honesty, society casts him out. He may want to return to a life of respectability and uprightness, but he finds it desperately hard. His evil record is constantly being brought up against him. He finds himself confronted by the "closed door." But, if so-called respectable society keeps its doors closed, there is always an

“open door” back to the Father’s house. The Gospel means nothing if it does not mean that. The teaching of the Parable of the Prodigal Son means nothing if it does not mean that. “Bring forth the best robe and put it on him and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet”—there was an “open door.”

There is an open door for every one. Our Lord proclaimed a forgiving love that denied itself to none. Publicans and sinners found the “open door.” The harlot found the “open door.” The dying robber found the “open door.” “To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses though we have rebelled against Him.” Men who have fallen to the lowest depths may, in Christ, have the right to call themselves the children of God. No one is condemned hopelessly and helplessly to the outer darkness. No one is finally shut out of the pardoning grace of God. It matters not how far men may have wandered or how deeply they may have sinned, there is a way back. “Behold,” says Christ, “I have set before thee a door opened.”

And there is not only an "open door" to the Father's house and heart, but there is also an open door and a way back to the lost heights of purity. Our Lord preaches not only pardon but recovery; not simply forgiveness but restoration. One of the most terrible aspects of sin is its enslaving power. Men have often felt themselves so tyrannised over by their sins that they have felt that the door of goodness was for ever closed against them. "It's of no use," said a young fellow who had fallen a victim to drink, "I cannot fight against it." He saw nothing before him but a closed door. But our Lord proclaims the recoverability of every soul. No door, He says, is finally closed. "Thou hast a little power," He said to the church at Philadelphia, but the "little power" reinforced by His omnipotence was sufficient for every task. It was not insurmountable difficulties that confronted Philadelphia, but an "open door" of opportunity. It is only a "little power" that many a man has left to him—only the weak and broken remnant of a will—but that little power reinforced by Christ's strength will be sufficient. For

Christ has conquered sin and mastered it, and by His grace weak and frail man may conquer and master it too. That means that recovery is possible; it means "the open door." "Where sin abounds, grace doth abound more exceedingly."

"Go," said Jesus to more than one penitent, "and sin no more." That meant that it was possible for them to escape from the dominion of their sin. There was a way back for them to holiness and purity. "Conceive a man damned," Stevenson makes one of his characters say, "to a choice of only evil—misconduct upon either side—nought left him but the choice of sins, how would you say then?" And Nance, the other party to the conversation, replies, "I would say that he was deceived, Mr. Archer; I would say that there was a third choice and that the right one." That is Stevenson's refusal to subscribe to the doctrine of the "closed door" in morals. He believed in and he preached the "open door" of recovery and victory.

But the mightiest preacher of this blessed Gospel is just Jesus Himself. He proved

Himself the conqueror of sin and death when He rose triumphantly from the dead. Sin is no longer master—there is a Stronger than the strong. Christ can lift a man clean above the power of sin and enable him to stand in the evil day. And experience ratifies and confirms the truth of His preaching. Men have not only been forgiven but restored. They have been lifted up from the dunghill and set among princes. By the grace of Christ weak and broken men have come off more than conquerors. Sinners have developed into saints. No man need surrender to his sin. “There is a way for man to rise.” To every one honestly desirous of strength and holiness and moral victory Christ says, “Behold, I have set before thee a door opened.”

### III

Let me illustrate the truth finally in the matter of death. What is death? To all outward appearance it looks like the final closing of the door. It looks like the end of activity, the end of love, the end of life it-



self. It was so the ancient world, to a very large extent, thought of it. The people of that ancient world knew of no Beyond. Death, to them, was a closed door. But in the light of our Lord's Resurrection we know that death is no closed door. The angel stands in the grave of our own dead as he did in that of our Lord and says, "He is not here: he is risen." The message of the Risen Lord about death is this, "Behold, I have set before thee a door opened." That is what death is—the open door to larger life. And the fact that death is but the gateway to larger and fairer life makes all the difference to us.

I have referred a good deal to Stevenson in this chapter. Let me at this point tell an incident in his grandfather's life. He was on a tour of inspection of the lighthouses on the Scottish coast. The ship *Pharos* in which he sailed was riding at anchor by the Bell Rock on 5th September 1807, when a great storm broke out. All that day and the next it raged with unabated violence, now threatening to tear the ship from her moorings, now to break her in pieces as she rode. After

twenty-seven hours of what to the landsmen seemed imminent peril, Robert Stevenson made the best of his way aft and saw the tremendous spectacle of the waves. On the deck there was only one solitary individual looking out to give the alarm in the event of the ship breaking from her moorings, and he stood aft the foremast, to which he had lashed himself with a small rope round his waist to prevent his falling on deck or being washed overboard. When Robert Stevenson looked up, he appeared to smile. He was much relieved by the smile of the watch on the deck, though the man was literally lashed to the foremast. From that time he felt almost perfectly at ease; at any rate he was entirely resigned to the ultimate result. And ever since the first Easter morning, men in the midst of the fierce storm of death have looked up and have seen Jesus with the smile of assurance and victory upon His face, and at the sight of that smile they have been much comforted and have been perfectly at ease, because they have known that beyond the storm there was the desired haven; that after the darkness there would

be the dawning of a better day; that the end would be not shipwreck but an abundant entrance.

We may all see our Man on the lookout with the smile on His face. We may be quite happy about ourselves when our end comes. We may be quite happy about those dear lads who in their thousands have fallen in this Great War. They have not perished. Death is not a *cul-de-sac*, it is an open door. They are still "carrying on" in a fairer and better world. Do you remember Browning's great optimism:—

All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good  
shall exist,  
Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty, nor good,  
nor power

Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for  
the melodist

When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.  
The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth  
too hard,

The passion that left the ground to lose itself in  
the sky,

Are music sent up to God by the lover and the  
bard,

Enough that He heard it once, we shall hear it  
by and by.

And Browning is right. For death is not cessation, extinction, the end; it is the "open door" into full and perfect life.

Have we Christian folk laid hold of this great and mighty Gospel? Have we attained to the Christian view of death? Is not our sorrow far too unrelieved? Is there not a lack amongst us of that note of joy and triumph that goes sounding through the New Testament? Those of my readers who have read the *Memorials of Sir Edward Burne Jones* will perhaps remember what he says about Browning's funeral. It was far too sombre to please him. "I would have given something for a banner or two, and much would I have given if a chorister had come out of the triforium and rent the air with a trumpet." The trumpet—with its note of defiance and triumph—was what Burne Jones wanted to hear. And he was right. That is the instrument with which to greet death and the grave. Paul put it to his lips when he cried, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" Let us put it to our lips, too, and even in the midst of our sorrows rejoice in glorious

hope. For the grave is not an impassable barrier; it is the "open door" to blessed peace, to realised desire, to fulness of opportunity, and to endless day.









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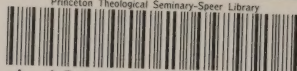
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